SUPERMAN LIVES-?

#120

SUPERMAN SUPER-SCRIPTER
ROGER STERN
DROPS SOME CLUES

GARY
JACKSON
EXCLUSIVE
MAN
TAGE
STAR

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

COMICS INTERVIEW

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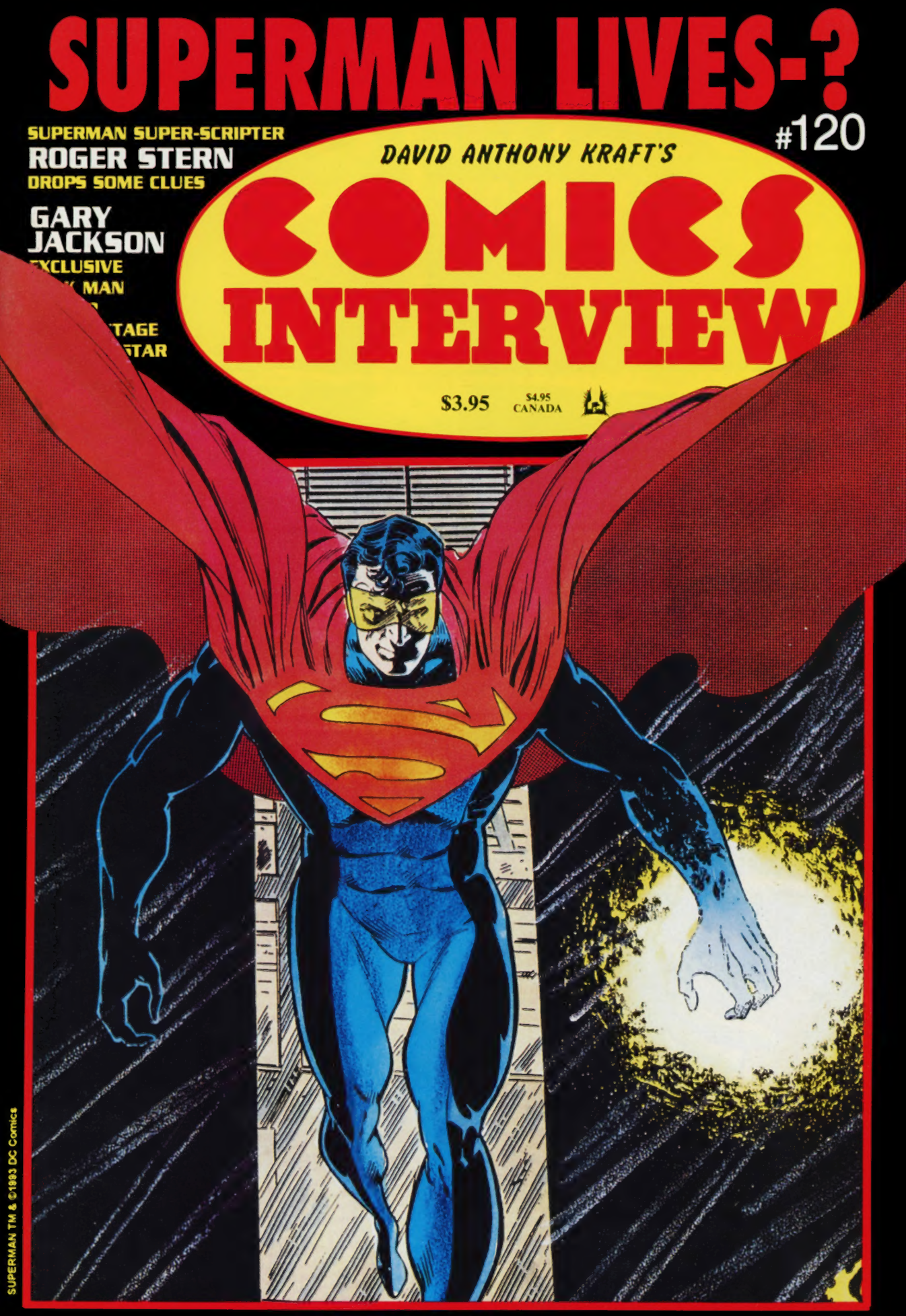

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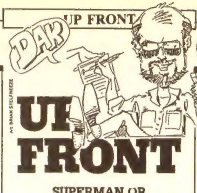

UP FRONT

SUPERMAN OR SUPERFLUOUS?

The very first comic book I remember "reading" (rather, at my early age, looking at the pictures) is Dell's TARZAN — long before I ever saw a movie or TV show featuring the ape man, and about ten years before I laid eyes upon the **Frazetta** cover for Ace's TARZAN AND THE LION MAN paperback.

But the very first *superhero* comic I discovered was SUPERMAN. I even managed (somehow) to have a subscription, and remember eagerly watching the mailbox for each new issue. Next I found the SUPERMAN reruns on Saturday morning TV, starring **George Reeves** and, the next thing you know, I ordered a Superman costume from Sears, Roebuck & Co. (back when they had . . . ahem . . . a mail-order catalog operation).

I shared this enthusiasm with a friend, Daniel, until we discovered Batman and decided — with all the piercing laser-like reasoning of six-year-olds — that Superman was "stupid" and "unrealistic." Not too long after that, in an afternoon analysis of shared observations, we decided that they were *both* stupid and unrealistic, and that marked an end to my comic-book reading, until a few years later when I discovered Marvel Comics.

Every so often, I would flirt with a return to reading SUPERMAN — when **Denny O'Neill** revamped the Man of Steel and, supposedly, started the whole new era in that issue with the wonderful cover by **Neal Adams**; when various and sundry other editors and/or creators made their own (brief) attempts to impact the legend; when I had my own turn at scripting Superman in WORLD'S FINEST COMICS circa #300. By the time **John Byrne** had his shot at revamping the Man of Steel, I confess I didn't even bother reading it, guessing (accurately) that it would be a short-lived flash in the pan, like all the others.

But I was really impressed with the first SUPERMAN movie, which captured for me the feel of the early Marvel Comics that had enraptured me long after the Man of Steel.

Anyway, now they've gone and done it. Killed him — dead. Or . . . have they? According to **Friedrich Nietzsche**, that which does not kill you, makes you stronger. An apropos "epitaph" for Superman. Will this time result in a *really* revamped — and readable; nay, interesting and contemporary — version of Superman?

I sure hope so!

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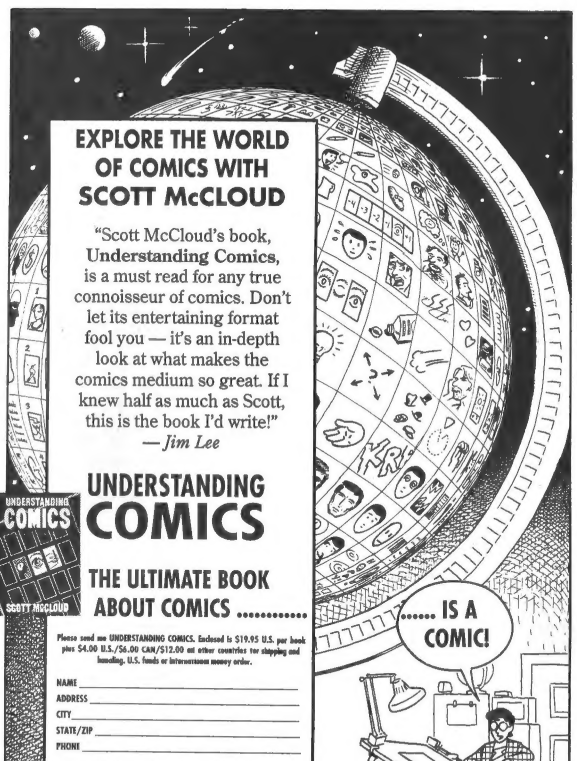

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"There are a lot of different ways to look at Superman."

REIGN OF THE SUPERMEN

As the senior Superman comics writer on the Man of Steel's titles, Roger Stern has been one of the architects of the most popular and successful storylines in the history of Siegel & Shuster's character. Reverberating throughout American culture, Superman's final battle struck a chord and brought in millions of readers to comics shops anew. With Superman's death fading from the headlines, the task for the Superman creators now is to maintain interest in their "multiple Superman" storyline, deal with the after-effects of a hero's death, and of course play with the question foremost on the minds of readers: When is Superman coming back to life?

MARK LUCAS: *Superman's coming back to life.*

ROGER STERN: Well, Supe*r*men are going to be appearing. As to whether or not it's the original, it's still up in the air.

MARK: *There are four different Superman who are going to come back . . .*

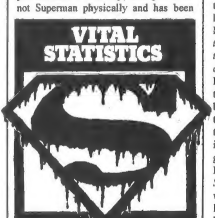
ROGER: At least four.

MARK: *At least four? So, there may be more.*

ROGER: There could be more!

MARK: *Do these Supermen represent different aspects of our former Man of Steel?*

ROGER: In some respects, I think they do. There are physical aspects that are similar. There are emotional and personality aspects that are similar. One of the Supermen, a very different individual, is referred to as being possessed of a "walk-in spirit," which is sort of a psychic phenomenon. Obviously, this person is not Superman physically and has been around in some other form, but the theory is Superman's spirit has walked in and possessed him. As to whether it's what's happened, it's yet to be revealed. It's been suggested that, maybe, Superman's psyche fractured into four and a little bit of him is in each of these four. Or, maybe some combination of these four, or maybe none of them are Superman. That's the big mystery. People are going to have a chance to read the stories and judge for themselves and argue about it and write letters and . . . who knows what'll happen?



MARK: *There's a general feeling that these four (or more) Supermen are just a temporary measure until you reintroduce the "true" Man of Steel.*

ROGER: Well, maybe. When we started this, we never anticipated having the books go on hiatus or any of the other things that followed. It's just something that's grown and literally taken on a life of its own. It seems to keep growing as it goes.

MARK: *Do you think this Reign of the Supermen lessens the impact of the individual stories for this?*

ROGER: I think it adds to the stories. We have four books and four creative teams.

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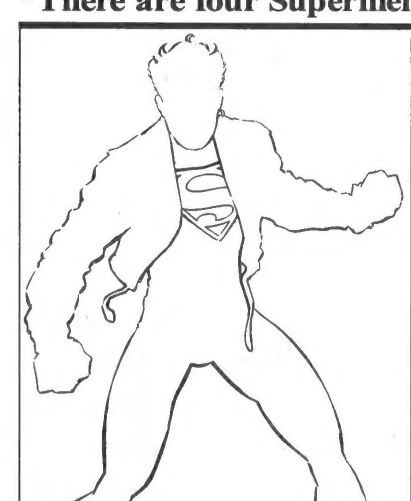
"There are four Supermen. Next they'll



Each team has its own Superman to play with.There will be individual stories there, and there will be cross-overs as well with the individual Supermen meeting and encountering each other for the first time. Some may get along and some may not. There are just endless possibilities. In my first ACTION COMICS story (#687), there are *two* Supermen. One is a fellow who's been around before. Aw, it's Bibbo! Everyone's down and depressed because Superman is dead, and Bibbo is going, "Ey, Supergirl and Gangbuster are doing their best., Crime is up, and people are depressed and mean-spirited. They need a Sooperman! And, if they need a Sooperman that bad, I'm gonna give 'em one, even if I gotta do it myself!" He puts on an old sweatshirt with an "S" on it, old sweatpants with red gym shorts over them, and high-top sneakers. He's going to go out and do the best he can to live up to the ideals of his favorite. It's sort of like an aging Rocky as Superman.

MARK: *That would seem to illustrate that everybody wants to be Superman.*

ROGER: That reflects life. A lot of people would like to be Superman. Wouldn't you like to be Superman? I'd like to be a Superman. There have been lots of times when I would've loved to have been Superman. Maybe not every day. To be able to fly effortlessly, for nothing to be an obstacle in your path. It's probably a good thing a lot of us aren't Superman. A friend of mine once said, if he were Superman, the first thing he'd do is fly to the United Nations and say, "As your new king . . ."

MARK: *What would you do?*

ROGER: What would I do? That's hard to say. I know people wouldn't cut me off in traffic anymore. Though, being able to fly would be handy.

MARK: *Then, just what or who is Superman? Is he just a character or is he much more than that?*

ROGER: Well, there are a lot of different ways to look at Superman. In some respects, he is an ideal. He's a larger-than-life character who represents the best we could hope to be, someone who does the right thing for the right reasons. I was at a convention in Cleveland in 1988 (the big Superman convention they put on). We had a panel/discussion. Someone from the audience asked the question, "Why does Superman do what he does? We know why Batman does what he does — because his parents were killed in front of his eyes. And, Spider-Man feels guilty. Why does Superman do what he does? And, I said, "Because that's the way his parents brought him up." It's because Ma and Pa said that's the way to live your life. He loves and respects his parents. It's a real middle-American origin. He was brought up right. He does it because he was brought up right! He came from a good, solid, working-class family of farmers. There was stunned silence in the audience for a moment. The guy who asked the question looked confused like it never occurred to him. Then, there was applause.

MARK: *You're suggesting, if he crash landed in New York City, he might grow up to be Bibbo or someone?*

ROGER: Not Bibbo. Bibbo was actually from Milwaukee. I think he might have been like Vinnie Barbarino. He might not have done things for the right reasons. What if he had parents who didn't bring him up right? Oooh! Scary! Then we might have had Dr. Doom or something. Actually, it would make for an interesting story. Returning to Superman as an ideal, we also have Superman as the personality,

be starting their own Superman Corps."

as the alter-ego of Clark Kent. This relates to the ideal and the upbringing. He's a small town boy from a farm out in the Great Plains, with your old-fashioned ideals: hard-working Protestant work ethic, which I think is so valid in a lot of cases. He's still an idealist. He's not naive. People who don't understand Superman say that he's naive, he's a boy scout, he's a do-gooder. He's been around. He's seen corruption. He knows it. He's a reporter for a major newspaper in a major urban area. He's seen plenty of corruption. He's seen it all. He can't hide from it. So, he doesn't really have a lot of misconceptions about the world he lives in. But, he's trying to make it better. I think that's the key to what makes him so appealing. He keeps trying to make things work right. Batman comes at it from the opposite direction. Batman's trying to make the world sane because his is insane. I think everyone's a little crazy. But, Superman's a little more optimistic. Batman is driven; Superman is an optimist. He's not a cock-eyed optimist; in fact, his vision is very good.

MARK: *Your "new" Superman in ACTION is going to be a more ruthless character, unconcerned with taking a life.*

ROGER: The Superman in ACTION is sort of the Old Testament Superman. The title of the second story (in ACTION) #688) is called "An Eye for an Eye." If this guy comes across someone committing mayhem, he says, "Okay, we'll give you a little mayhem and see how you like it." He's not a nice individual to be around. On the surface, he's cold and distant. Inside, all the passions and angers are festering in there, like Mt. St. Helens waiting to go off. When this guy gets set off, you want to make sure you haven't crossed him. This would not be good. This would be very bad. The anger is an aspect of the original Superman. We didn't show him get angry very often. When he did, you knew it. This guy's fuse is a little shorter. It rages a lot closer to the surface. The mitigating factors of Superman's upbringing as Clark Kent don't seem to be there in this guy. Maybe they've been lost or misplaced . . . if he is the original Superman. I have to admit, there are certain things in ACTION #687 that indicate that he could well be. In fact, it's pretty blatant. And, people will want to know what happens next.

MARK: *So, what does happen next?*

ROGER: We get some pictures, some word balloons, a couple numbers. Seriously, the first story (ACTION #687) is called "Born Again." We see where this Superman comes from and why he's taken the name. He then sees that things are bad in Metropolis and starts taking care of them. Someone's about to be killed? He takes care of the would-be killer. Cat burglars are breaking into someplace? Dangle them off the rooftops and see how they like it. If someone is a carjacker trying to steal a car and endanger someone, he takes care of that guy in a painful way.

MARK: *Like John Ostrander's Spectre?*

ROGER: More like Jerry Siegel's Spectre. With this version of Superman, I'm trying to echo certain aspects, certain of the tougher aspects of the original Superman. The guy who would pick someone up and throw him into the air. In a very early Superman story, Lois Lane had been captured by racketeers. He smashes in to the warehouse where she's being held. A gangster pulls a gun to shoot her. Superman picks up one of the gangsters and throws him into the path of the bullet, thus saving Lois and saving the cost of a trial. Superman didn't mess around! He's going out, fighting evil, and meting out justice. In the second story in ACTION #688, he crosses paths with Guy Gardner, who's also along those lines. Guy has just come back from space. In his own book, he's been doing something with the Gardners of the Universe (that *is* Gardners, not Guardians — See Guy Gardner's own book). He's just come back from space. He picks up a news magazine. What's going on in the world? There are four Supermen. He's going,

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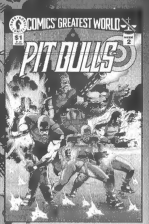

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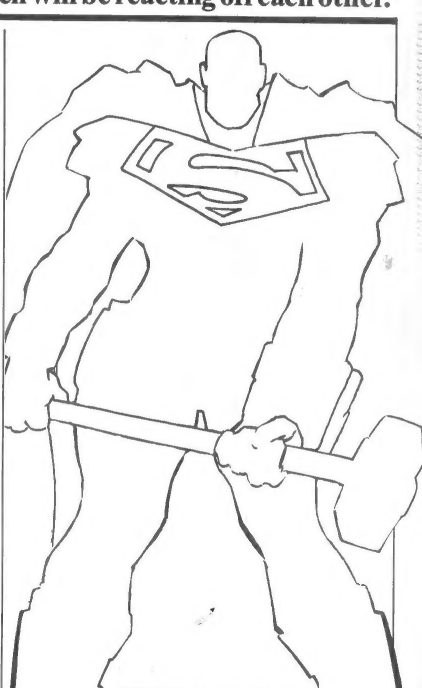
"All the Supermen will be reacting off each other."

"What's this?!? Next thing you know, they'll be starting their own Superman Corps." Guy never had a whole lot of use for Superman, but he had to admire the guy for the way he went out. He gave his all, he bought the farm, but he stopped the bad guy, which finally won him the respect that he needed in Guy's eyes. So, Guy really isn't keen on the fact that there are four guys pretending to be Superman. He doesn't like this in a big way. He's going to hum-down and give them a piece of his mind. As luck would have it, the first one he crosses his path with is my guy in ACTION COMICS. They cause a little havoc which will probably need some urban renewal to take care of. After their initial falling out, Guy thinks that this guy is all right. If this guy isn't the real Superman, he ought to be. He knows how to take care of the bad guys. Of course, someone like this would probably give this Superman cause to doubt his method of operation. "If this clown (Guy) thinks I'm doing it right, maybe I should reassess this. Maybe I'm wrong." If Guy Gardner thinks it's right, he might be mistaken.

MARK: *And then . . .?*

ROGER: Then, things really start to happen. This Superman hangs out at the Fortress a lot. It's his Fortress. It's his headquarters. He has all the big monitor screens. He can see what's going on. He's been busy. Until he ran into Guy Gardner, he wasn't aware that there were other guys out there calling themselves Superman. At first, he thinks they're just rumors, tabloid stuff, things like that. Then, he starts checking the monitors and starts seeing these other guys out there doing stuff. They're all wearing big "S"'s on their chests. And, he's not keen on that. In a bit more circumspect fashion than Guy Gardner used, he goes out in his nightly duties, checking out Metropolis and the world, crossing paths with the Superman from MAN OF STEEL. They have what we should probably call a "falling out." It's an unfortunate misunderstanding in much the way South Korea and Japan have in recent years agreed to refer to Japan's occupation of that country during World War II as an "unfortunate misunderstanding." These guys go at each other, winding up fighting virtually, if not literally, from one end of the country to the other. They wind up on the west coast. This will be a cross-over between ACTION #689 and MAN OF STEEL #24. Let's say it's action packed. Eventually, all of the Supermen will be acting and reacting off of each other. Some of them are more aware of each other than others.

MARK: *What of Clark Kent?*



ROGER: Ah, what indeed of Clark Kent? This is a question that's really bugging Lois, more than just about anybody. By this time, everyone assumed Clark was probably under a building someplace, because 1,000 or more people in Metropolis had buildings fall on them when Doomsday came through. For weeks, they were pulling people out of buildings. In the first few days, they were rescuing people, and after that they were finding bodies, more or less. It's been

"Superman is more trouble dead than alive."

some weeks now, and the rescue efforts have about stopped. By this point, if anyone was alive down there, they weren't anymore. The demolition crews are out, carting off the rubble and occasionally finding a body. Everyone at the Daily Planet — Clark's friends there — have resigned themselves to the fact that he isn't coming back. Before this, they were all encouraging Lois, telling her not to give up hope, that Clark was always a fighter. He'll probably turn out to be okay and she shouldn't worry. Now, she knew that Clark was Superman. And, she knew that he was either on a slab in the morgue or in a tomb someplace. She knew that he wasn't coming back. Now the situation has done a 180. The others are all saying that Clark isn't coming back and they need to help Lois get through this. But, there are these four Supermen out there. Lois is going, "Well, but if one of those is the real one, then Clark is still alive." Everyone is commiserating with her. Now she's in the opposite situation, confused about this whole state of affairs. And, she still can't tell anybody. She's back in the situation where she was 8-9 years earlier when Superman first turned up. She's trying to track these guys down, figuring out which are really there and which Supermen really exist or are just rumors and tabloid stuff (the "I saw Superman chowing down" type). She's trying to separate the rumors and the phony sightings from the real things, to track these guys down and find out if one is the real one. Within the first issues of the books, she starts meeting these guys. She's a chief investigative reporter. Some things add up and some things don't. As she says at one point to Cat Grant, "These Supermen are out there. They're out there rescuing people. They're stopping accidents. They're catching criminals. They're doing a lot of the right things. On the other hand, it doesn't always seem they're doing them for the right reasons. Some of these guys who look the most like Superman, I have problems with. And, some of the ones who don't look so much like him . . . who knows?" She's trying to get to the bottom of this and isn't finding any easy answers. And, it's bothering her a lot.

MARK: *Is some of that idealizing the Clark Kent Superman?*

ROGER: A lot of it, because the original Superman was Clark Kent. In a story one time, Clark said, "Superman is just a suit I put on. I take my glasses off and do this. I can then come home and be me." Again, there is the factor of his upbringing with the Kents, who are bothered by all of this too. Pa is sitting home recovering from his heart attack. They have the cable on and think, "Dagnabbit! *He* wouldn't do that!" Or, "Maybe . . . I dunno. Is it possible? If one of those guys is really Superman come back from the dead, what changes has he gone through? Is there any part of Clark left? Maybe Clark was the mortal part of him. Maybe Clark didn't come back. Maybe everything that wasn't Clark came back. And, where does that leave us?"

MARK: *There's a lot there.*

ROGER: Every time I look at this, I think, "There are more stories!" It just keeps growing. Every time you turn around, there are more consequences to look at. That's really the name of the game when you come up with a story: What are the long-term consequences of this? If Superman comes in and saves a bunch of lives someplace, what happens? People start to count on him. And, when he's not around, people start to fall apart, because they're grown to count on him too much. Consequences — long-term consequences — are the most important things to consider when you're writing a continuing series, because one thing literally leads to another. A story you did a year ago, the effects of it keep growing. It's like the ripple effect. You throw a stone in a pond and circles go back. You throw another and the circles intersect. There's constructive and destructive effects as the circles meet. In some places, they cancel each other out and dissolve the effect; in some places the effect is reinforced and gets stronger. Each little incident, each person he runs into, changes the course of the way things go. That's what makes it interesting.

MARK: *Will there be less-tight continuity on the Superman titles now that they're shipping monthly and you have four different characters as opposed to one?*

ROGER: The stories don't necessarily have to be linear. They are linear in dealing with the supporting characters — Lois, Jimmy, Professor Hamilton, Perry, Supergirl, and Luthor. Luthor! He's really messed up by this. He's going, "Now I've got four of them to contend with! Superman is more trouble dead than alive."

MARK: *Five if you count Bibbo.*

ROGER: "How many more?"

MARK: *How many more?*

ROGER: That's a good question. Maybe Guy Gardner was right. Maybe there will be a Superman Corps.

MARK: *ACTION #700 is coming up about a year from now.*

ROGER: Oh, that's right.

MARK: *Any forecast of what you're heading toward?*

ROGER: If one of these guys is the real Superman, and if there's anything of

"Superman's a complex character with many layers."

Clark left in him . . . There was an engagement, after all. That would be interesting. Or, maybe they'll all move to Utah. Which one will Lois pick? Best three out of four?

MARK: *Like "The Dating Game"?*

ROGER: "Superman #3: If you were going to show me a really good time, what would it be?"

MARK: *That would make a good Mxyzptlk story.*

ROGER: Can you imagine how confused he would be?

MARK: *Are you dropping clues throughout this like a mystery, leading to some big . . .*

ROGER: There will be all sorts of clues. The two or three people who know me really well will probably recognize them as clues. Everyone else will probably pick the wrong things. It's uncanny. Over the years, whenever I do a story, whenever I think that something was really obvious, those are the things people miss. I don't know why. It's like some mutant ability of some type. And then, they'll pick something which is just there, in the background. A clue!! No, it's the door. No, not really. I don't know why. When we did the "Death of Superman" story, there were all these rumors going around. He'll be back here. He'll be back there. They were all wrong. When we finally announced that we were bringing in four Supermen, I started hearing outrageous rumors. One was that they are four clones and there'll be one of each racial type . . . and one's going to be a woman. Probably not if they're going to be called *Superman*. One great dumb rumor I heard was that the pre-Crisis Superboy had come of age and was going to be one of the new Supermen. Well, since in the new continuity he never existed, I kind of doubt that. Someone even suggested that Bizarro was going to be recreated and be a Superman. It's interesting . . . It's not an idea we're using, but it's interesting.

MARK: *Have you heard the idea of what you're actually planning?*

ROGER: No, which is why I think we've probably done it right. No one has actually guessed what we're doing yet. So, we've managed to surprise everyone. Some have come close. No, you've got it half-right on one of them but not on all of them. Some have guessed components but have always got them in the wrong order. With this many elements, you would have to have a piece of all of our brains to figure this out. After all, there are about a dozen of us involved in this. It's that ripple effect again. It makes it hard to guess.

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WE'VE GOT HIM, FRAN! NEW PARAGRAPH!
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". . . ROCKETING HIM AWAY FROM METROPOLIS, TOWARD THE VACUUM OF SPACE." END OF PARAGRAPH.

...permen, that's four

MARK: *Do you think the public is going to take to any character but the one, true Superman? And what if it does?*

ROGER: That's a good question. What if one of these guys becomes the most popular one? It's something we'll deal with when we get to it. Won't they want the one, true Superman? Everyone out there seems to have their own, individual idea of who the one, true Superman is. When **John Byrne** did his last issues dealing with the alternate Kryptonians, in which Superman had to execute them, a handful of people were outraged "Superman would never do this." They were right, Superman would never do this, except in the stories done before 1942. When Superman was relaunched, in 1986, there were people who were convinced that having Ma and Pa alive was the biggest mistake because it was their death that made him Superman. No, it wasn't. It was their upbringing that made him Superman. Everyone has their own little, individual spin on the thing. For them, their spin is perfectly valid. They may be overlooking something or may be shortsighted about certain aspects of the character, but everyone fixates on one particular aspect of Superman. If that one particular aspect is there, okay. If it's something else . . . But, Superman is such a complex character with so many different layers. It's like the old parable of the blind man and the elephant: everyone sees something different, often without taking in the big picture. Partly that's because he's a comic-book character. Traditionally, a lot of people — rightly or wrongly — think of comic-book characters as being very two-dimensional. Superman really isn't. He is very straight-forward in certain things. What makes him that way? How did he become that way? It's the back story and all of these textures to the story. He's really very, very deep. It's just the results that are straight-forward. With the four new Supermen that we have, that's four times the texture . . . unless they're all just parts of the one. Or, some of them are parts of the one.

MARK: *What if one of these characters, say, your Superman, becomes immensely popular. Could Peter David have been right, that this is what people want, a "darker" Superman?*

ROGER: I don't know. We'll find out I guess. I have my own ideas on which one's going to be the most popular one. Maybe these guys will still be around 3, 4, 5, 10, 25, or 50 years from now. Who knows? Superman is an incredibly popular and wonderful character. In hindsight. Nobody knew. **Siegel** and **Shuster** came up with this great character. He was the right character at the right time. He's such a great character that he's lasted this long, through all sorts of strange incarnations and different spins on the character. He's got legs, and he flies. But, no one knew. **Siegel** and **Shuster** spent five years knocking on doors and pounding the pavement trying to get people to buy this character. The usual response was, "No commercial potential." Right. I read this in **Frank Jacob's** book on **Bill Gaines.** There was a section on his father, **Max Gaines,** and the creation of comics. One of the owners of what became DC Comics saw the cover of ACTION #1, with Superman lifting the car over his head, and said, "No one will ever believe this. We made a terrible mistake." Superman was not on the cover again until issue #7 or thereabouts. By that time, the sales figures were in, and they figured, "Oh, people will buy it!" When the character was brand-new, nobody knew, because he'd never been done before.

MARK: *The death of Superman has tapped into some underlying element of America's consciousness by the way it's reverberated through us. Why do you think it's had such a great effect at this time*

ROGER: I've given that some thought. I think a lot of it is the time and what's going on in the world today. Certainly, there are a good 2-3 generations now who've grown up with Superman. He's

times the texture . . . unless they're one."

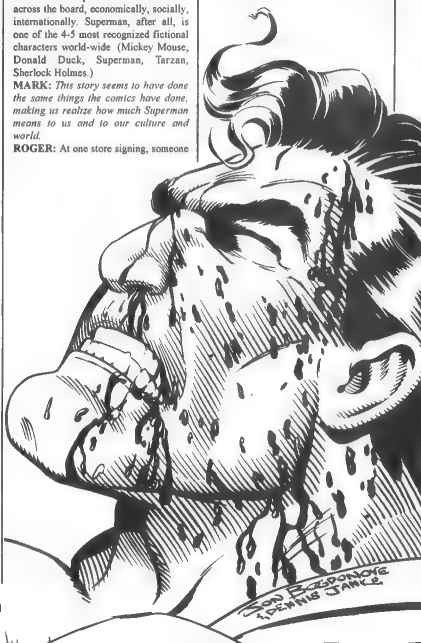
always been there. With the news of the death getting out when it did, partly through luck of a news day. If Bosnia had blown up that day, or if George Bush had barricaded himself in the White House and not come out, or any number of things, it would have been a one-column on page 67. No one would have noticed. But, the news did get out, probably due to a slow news day, probably to luck, and probably due to the fact that the media are just covering comics more than they used to. Part of that is that there are a lot of reporters who grew up reading comics. Three generations who have grown up with comics heard the news, and reacted. We'd like there to be a Superman, someone who can come through for you when nothing else can. It would have been great during the later winter blizzard and what the east coast went through: Turning the fronts back, rescuing the people, plowing the roads. It would have been great. *This* was a job for Superman. We could have used him. But, he wasn't here. People would like there to be a Superman like that. There hasn't been much heroism in the world in the past decade. You get little bits of it here and there and people grab for them whenever they can see it or are aware of it. I was talking to some people some time ago who said they didn't think it was a coincidence that the beginnings of the Silver Age of Comics and the Kennedy Administration intersected, and superheroes became so big. For all of its faults, it was a young, vital, heroic time. Maybe we're coming into another one. That would be nice. I'd like to think so. The years we've just come through have not been very nice to a lot of people. People would like them to be better. The death of Superman is like the last little briar in the crown of thorns of the '80s (if you'll pardon a mixed metaphor there). When we were in Florida for the Hurricane Tour (benefiting a lot of the comics shops that suffered damage and such from Hurricane Andrew) at the end of January, we were signing comics in one store. There were kids and the usual sort of comics store customers. A lot of mom and pops and a lot of families came, interested in Superman together. Being the Miami area, there is a large Cuban-American population. A lot of people learned to read English through these comics. This one fellow came in and said, "My uncle could not believe it! They killed Superman and Castro is still alive! What kind of world is this?" That really sums it up. It can't get more down to earth than something like that. Not to put the lives of real people on the level of fictional characters, but these people want there to be a Superman. I did an introduction to a sourcebook for Mayfair Games on Superman a year or so ago. In the introduction, I brought up some interesting things. During the Iranian hostage crisis, there was this New York cabbie who said, "We should send Superman over there. He could take care of them." When Challenger blew up, there was a 6-year-old boy in Texas who said he wished he could have been Superman to have gone up and save them. People would love for there to be a Superman. Of course, if there actually were a Superman, a lot of people would be looking over their shoulder every minute (and probably with good reason). But, it would be great for there to be a Superman. I think that cuts across the board, economically, socially, internationally. Superman, after all, is one of the 4-5 most recognized fictional characters world-wide (Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Superman, Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes.)

MARK: *This story seems to have done the same things the comics have done, making us realize how much Superman means to us and to our culture and world.*

ROGER: At one store signing, someone asked editor Mike Carlin, "How can you do this?" And Mike replied, "To see if you were paying attention." A lot of people were taking Superman for granted. I'm very proud of the Superman stories I've been writing for the past five years now. It's been five years I've written Superman

MARK: *Actually, it's been longer. Didn't you do the two-pagers in ACTION COMICS WEEKLY?*

ROGER: Yes, but that was weekly. The very first time I wrote about Superman for a comic book was the introductory short column/story in the second Superman/Spider-Man book that Marvel and DC produced. On the inside front cover were



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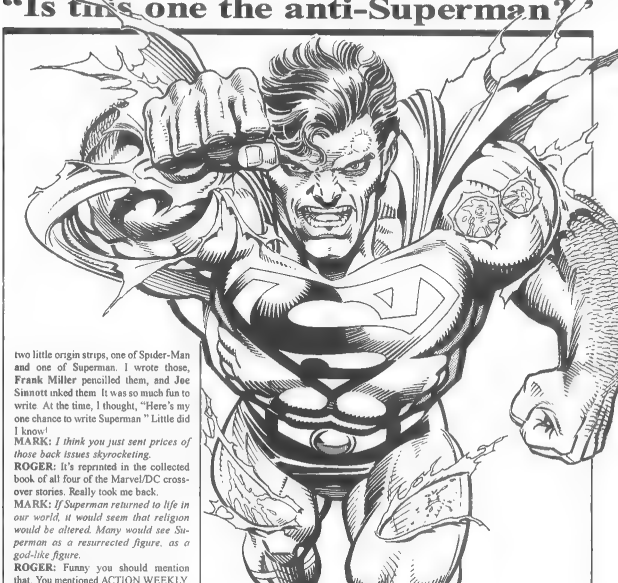
"Is this one the anti-Superman?"



two little origin strips, one of Spider-Man and one of Superman. I wrote those, **Frank Miller** pencilled them, and **Joe Sinnott** inked them. It was so much fun to write. At the time, I thought, "Here's my one chance to write Superman." Little did I know!

MARK: *I think you just sent prices of those back issues skyrocketing.*

ROGER: It's reprinted in the collected book of all four of the Marvel/DC cross-over stories. Really took me back.

MARK: *If Superman returned to life in our world, it would seem that religion would be altered. Many would see Superman as a resurrected figure, as a god-like figure.*

ROGER: Funny you should mention that. You mentioned ACTION WEEKLY. You may remember the story I developed in it that involved a cult that was worshipping Superman. Some of the remnants of that cult have turned up in ACTION COMICS. They're wearing blue robes with red S's on them. They were praying outside the tomb. Now that there are these four Supermen, they're convinced more than ever that one of them is the real one. The others must be pretenders or, perhaps, the anti-Superman. They're going nuts on that score. All of these people — terrorist groups and such — are claiming that they stole the body. Lois is wondering, "Maybe these four Supermen are responsible for the body missing, and they're part of some group, and this is some conspiracy." There are all these different things that could be possible. To get back to your question, my wife came up with an interesting thing. Suppose, just suppose, in early 1964, JFK starts turning up. One is this JFK cyborg who claims that he was rebuilt with massive technology. And, one is this infirmed JFK coming in in a wheelchair with all sorts of things to protect him. And, one is this younger version of JFK who looks like he did in his PT-109 days. One's a clone of JFK. What would people's reactions have been? A lot of people would dismiss this out of hand as media hype or a hoax or some supermarket tabloid story. They wouldn't believe it. Some would wonder, well, what if one of these guys is telling the truth? And, there will be some people who so want to see him back that they'll believe anything. There will be some who'll start building churches. There's this whole wide range in between ranging from out-and-out rejection to a religious experience. There's an almost infinite variety of reactions in between. That's what we're going to be seeing happening with Superman. People will be saying, "I believe in this guy. The others are pretenders. This guy's the real one." Is this one the anti-Superman? There are going to be some media reactions. Some will be playing their favorites. The teenage Superman who appears in ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN will become a

"It's hard to judge Superman's death. They

I CAN'T SPEAK FOR THE REST OF YOU, BUT I NEVER REALLY THOUGHT HE COULD DIE--HE'D CHEATED DEATH SO MANY TIMES.
IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE NEVER SEEING HIS FACE--OR HEARING HIS VOICE AGAIN--OR TAKING HIS EASY GOING NATURE FOR GRANTED..

favorite of the people at WGBS. They can promote this guy as their Superman and have exclusive stories. Of course, in the middle of everything, Luthor is trying to figure out a way to get all of these guys on retainer for Team Luthor. "If I owned my own Superman Corps!" He'd like that.

MARK: *When Superman returns, won't Lois feel mortal or diminished, living with a man who can literally defy death in some form or another?*

ROGER: That's an interesting question too. What do you do if it turns out that the man you loved died and came back. It's a little spooky. On the other hand, maybe he came back for her.

MARK: *With characters returning from the dead now, this seems to diminish the concept of death in comics. Isn't bringing back Superman encouraging this? If he comes back, was he really "dead"?*

ROGER: That really depends on how you define death. Death is death. You die. If something happens to you, you can't tell us about it because you're dead. But, there are different degrees of death now, at least that are recognized as such. There's clinical death. Their heart stopped on the operating table and they were revived. There have been people who have been in death-like comas who've come back. There've been people who've gone into vegetative states, and, probably unfortunately for them and certainly for their families didn't die, but their brains did. Medical science recognizes different degrees of death. What we've traditionally known as death is referred to as "brain dead" these days. If the brain is dead, it doesn't matter if the heart is kept going by a machine or something. This guy is dead. It was hard to judge Superman's death, wasn't it, because they couldn't really perform an autopsy. His body was still invulnerable. All they could do was judge it as best they could. Of course, this really begs the question of whether Superman has really come back or not. If he hasn't, we don't know what these other four guys are. If it's something metaphysical, who knows? It's hard to talk about diminishing death when we're talking about a universe where we have the Spectre, Deadman, and these other guys. If Superman were in a universe all by himself, then maybe it would affect perceptions of death. But, he's in the same universe with all of these other guys. Should we really get into this metaphysical thing? It's one of the strange side-effects of being part of a shared universe.

MARK: *Then, why him and not Jerry White (Perry White's late son)?*

ROGER: Jerry made a big sacrifice. But, he wasn't from the doomed planet Krypton, either. He was an ordinary person. Superman is just incredibly powerful. I think he's mortal. I think most of us do. He's hard to kill. Look, maybe he is dead. We won't really know until this latest series plays itself out, will we?

MARK: *What do you think your impact on the Man of Steel has been, and what do you think his impact has been on you, since you've been working on him for nearly 100 issues?*

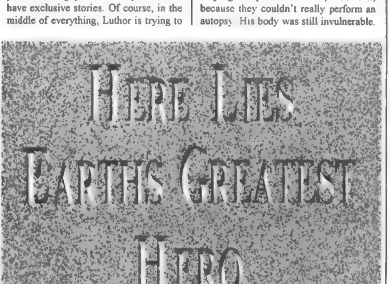
ROGER: Has it been that many issues?

MARK: *You're the senior writer now, with Jerry Ordway leaving.*

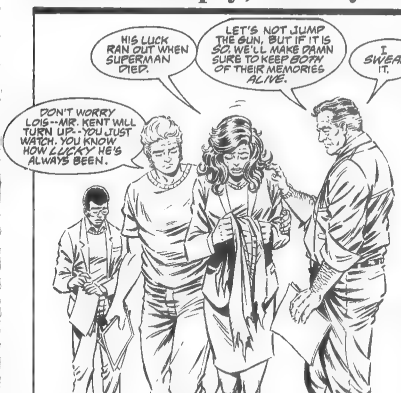
ROGER: It's been a lot of fun writing Superman. In a way, it's been an honor, really. I'm not being facetious or pretentious about that. I grew up watching Superman on TV and reading Superman comics. He was a big part of my life growing up. And, it's sort of nice to be able to help carry him along, coming up with new stories for him, and help keep him out there for another generation. It's been my chance to give back some of the enjoyment I received all of those years. It was also a big kick having stories I came up with illustrated by Curt Swan and Murphy Anderson, and having them tell me that they like my stories. I'm going to heaven! I've gotten to work with some incredibly talented people. I'm very proud of the stories I've done. They're some of the best stories I've ever written. They stand up against any of the stories I've ever written. I'm glad that we've been able to get people to wake up and pay attention. From what I've heard talking to people at various comics stores, the back issues are flying out the door. I'm glad I got a complete set.

MARK: *Do you see an end in sight to your relationship with Superman?*

ROGER: I hope not.



couldn't autopsy; his body's still invulnerable."


HIS LUCK RAN OUT WHEN SUPERMAN DIED.
LET'S NOT JUMP THE GUN, BUT IF IT IS SO, WE'LL MAKE DAMN SURE TO KEEP BOTH OF THEIR MEMORIES ALIVE.
I SWEAR IT.
DON'T WORRY LOIS--MR. KENT WILL TURN UP--YOU JUST WATCH. YOU KNOW HOW LUCKY HE'S ALWAYS BEEN.

MARK: *Do you see yourself working on ACTION #1,000?*

ROGER: How old will I be then? I'd love to keep working on Superman. By this time next July, I'm hoping to be doing something else in addition to Superman I've told Superman's death from three or four different perspectives at this point I wrote most of the stuff that's in NEWSTIME magazine and the SUPERGIRL AND TEAM LUTHOR story, and the "Funeral for a Friend." I'm also working on a novelization of this whole shebang that Bantam will be printing in hardcover in the fall. It's 150,000 words How many different ways can I write this story? When I was writing Spider-Man over the course of four years over a couple of different titles, I wound up doing a reprise of the origin of Spider-Man five different times in five different formats. It's great, but when I get the novel done, I'd like to do something in addition to Superman I have a Supergirl mini-series I'll be doing

MARK: *Will there be a Rose & Thorn mini-series?*

ROGER: That's a possibility. That was something that was actually suggested I do when I first started working for DC. In what I call my spare time, I do research on multiple personalities. The teaser with the Rose & Thorn story that's in LEGACY OF SUPERMAN was to revive that old DC teaser, "Readers! Do you want to find out more about Rose and Thorn? Write!" If there's enough of a response, maybe. I think, after all of these years and all the research I've done, I've come up with some interesting things on Rose & Thorn that have sort of been there but haven't really been brought out. I think I have a good, strong story with a good, strong ending If there's a demand, I'd love to do it

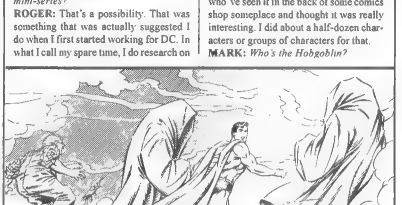
MARK: *You've worked on so many characters at both Marvel and DC. Is there any one you'd like to tackle that you haven't?*

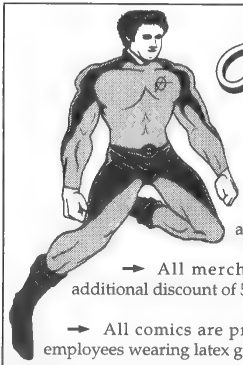
ROGER: There's so many characters, though a lot are spoken for at the moment. Hawkman would be fun It'd be great to write Green Lantern or the Flash. I got to write the Atom for awhile; that was fun. Maybe brung back Starman. There are a lot of bits that were missed. I've some whacky ideas for Kamandi. Challengers of the Unknown would be a big kick. Over at Marvel, I've written just about everything except for Daredevil. Iron Man would be fun

MARK: *Any desire to create your own characters?*

ROGER: I've come up with a half-dozen or so characters I've come up with. I did a portfolio a couple of years ago called COLLABORATIONS THE ART OF ROGER STERN AND HIS FRIENDS, in which I came up with character concepts and got my close personal friends, the artists, to draw them for me. It's out there There are probably some people out there who've seen it in the back of some comics shop someplace and thought it was really interesting. I did about a half-dozen characters or groups of characters for that.

MARK: *Who's the Hobgoblin?*





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"There are many ways it could go."

ROGER: *(Laughter.)* Well, he wasn't Ned Leeds.

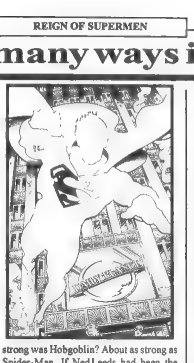
MARK: *It was probably as big a controversy in the comics industry as Superman's death has been outside*

ROGER: There are still people going crazy over that because I wouldn't tell anyone. When I plotted the Hobgoblin, I really didn't have an idea in mind who he was. But, as I scripted the story, and his dialogue and voice started turning up in the back of my head, I began going, "Ah, so that's who Hobgoblin is!" I didn't tell anybody else. I didn't tell my wife. I didn't tell my editor. I didn't tell the artist. They're going, "Who is this guy?" I was going, "I won't tell you." "Why not?" "If the secret gets out to too many people, it gets out. If I don't tell you, you don't have to worry about letting it slip." When the first story came out **John Byrne** and I

were talking. He was saying, "This is interesting. I like this. Who is this guy anyway?" I said, "I won't tell you." "What do you mean you won't tell me? I told you that Guardian was going to die in ALPHA FLIGHT." I said, "But I didn't ask you to. I didn't even tell my wife!" He drove himself crazy for awhile, but he finally gave up.

MARK: *Why keep the secret all these years, then?*

ROGER: Someday. I've already made this offer to Marvel a couple of times. Do a Hobgoblin mini-series and I'll show you who he really is. He obviously wasn't Ned Leeds. Even the story that revealed that Ned Leeds was the Hobgoblin was proof that he couldn't have been the Hobgoblin. Every time I point this out to people, they go, "Oh, yeah." How did Ned Leeds die? These three guys in jump suits came in the window and they killed him. Okay. How



strong was Hobgoblin? About as strong as Spider-Man. If Ned Leeds had been the Hobgoblin, and these three guys came in the window, what would happen to those three guys? They would've been reduced to red paste on the walls. But they weren't, were they? And what happened? They killed Ned. Therefore, Ned couldn't have been the Hobgoblin, now could he?

MARK: *Unless Ned isn't dead*

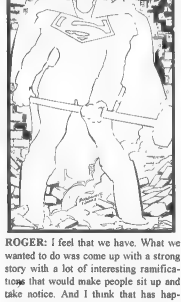
ROGER: No, I think Ned is dead. As far as I'm concerned, the guy who's really the Hobgoblin is still out there someplace, sitting in his lair, making his plans. As far as I'm concerned, Ned was someone who was had by the Hobgoblin, much the same that Lefty Donovan was. There's another guy who apparently was the Hobgoblin but wasn't. Both **John Romita, Jr.** and **Mark Bagley** have told me that they would be interested in joining it. I've told the Spider-Man editor, any time you're ready. The Hobgoblin is out there, getting

really steamed with these other guys running around, calling themselves Hobgoblin. One used to be Jack O'Lantern. I can see why he wanted to be the Hobgoblin. It's a better name. And, this Demogoblin guy! What the #$&%@! is this? I figure, eventually they'll let me do the story and reveal that the real Hobgoblin is out there and will cause some major damage to Spider-Man.

MARK: *Paralleling this with Superman, then, couldn't the real Man of Steel be out there watching these imitators?*

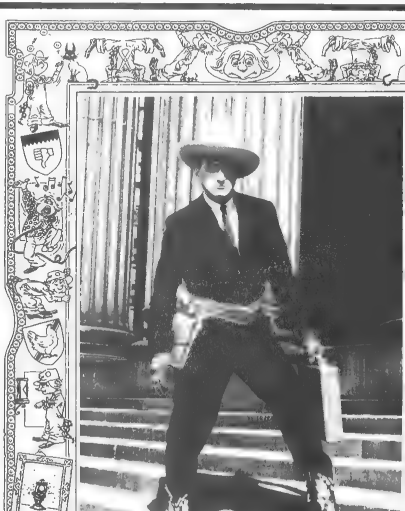
ROGER: Now, there's a thought. Maybe. That's assuming, of course, that he's still dead and one of these guys isn't him. There are so many possibilities. There are many ways it could go.

MARK: *Do you think you've accomplished what you've set out to do, when you started this whole story cycle?*



ROGER: I feel that we have. What we wanted to do was come up with a strong story with a lot of interesting ramifications that would make people sit up and take notice. And I think that has happened. It certainly happened far beyond DC's wildest dreams. This is the biggest success they've had in over fifty years of publishing. They've never had anything sell like this before. As far as Superman the product goes, it's been very successful. I've been encouraged in that most of the people I've run into, having me sign stuff at stores, have been *reading* it. They've been telling me how much they like the stories. This is proof to me that there are still people out there hungry for stories. It isn't just fancy artwork and the flavor-of-the-month. They're interested in the characters and interested in the stories. They're taking those black-bagged comics and ripping them open.

"You know I'm the cousin of John Severin? He's married



Here: Frontier lawyer (Jerry) — MAD TV Guide (Foley Place Court House). John Severin provided the heroic artwork/letterhead of CRACKED. Next page: Portrait of Jerry, from AUSTRALIAN RING DIGEST, circa 1951 — again, by cousin-in-law Severin.

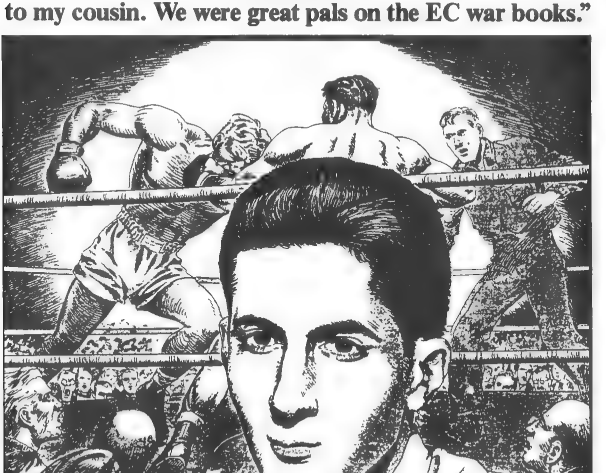
The people in the building on Lexington St. call the second floor the Bridal Suite. There the staff turns our BRIDAL GUIDE, a very high-gloss, classy magazine intended to be exactly what the name implies. Also on the same floor are the offices for the other Globe publications, including the infamous GLOBE, renowned for headlines that read like your average DOOM PATROL plot synopsis, and CRACKED magazine, also another publication in tended to be exactly what the name implies.

Jerry DeFuccio, co-editor of CRACKED, was kind enough to indulge this writer for an hour and spin the kind

JERRY DE FUCCIO

CRACKED material ® 1992 Globe Communications Corp. / John Severin artwork ® 1951-1992 John Severin / "Alias . . . The Owl" ® 1992 J. De Fuccio & Mort Bailey / PEANUTS ® 1992 Charles M. Schultz / Alfred E. Neuman & related MAD magazine material ® 1992 Warner Books.

to my cousin. We were great pals on the EC war books."



of tales that make you think you've been born too late to really be in on the good stuff . . .

BILL KIEFFER: *Obviously you're the co-editor of CRACKED magazine — tell us a little something about yourself.*

JERRY DEFUCCIO: Well, let's see, you know I'm the cousin of **John Severin?** He's married to my cousin.

BILL: *No, I didn't know that.*

JERRY: We were great pals on the EC war books, and he came to the house one night when my cousin happened to be there. After that, when he would leave the house, he would walk the railroad tracks with her at weird hours in the morning. I'm very proud of him. He's a consummate artist; he's more of an illustrator.

BILL: *Don Martin left MAD two, three years ago. Can you talk about that?*

JERRY: Well, you know, Don is a very quiet guy, a very nice guy. I remember Don, **Lou Silverstone,** and myself went on a trip together and we weren't the most rambunctious. We're basically three guys from Jersey.

BILL: *How much longer before you have the entire crew from MAD?*

JERRY: Well, I wouldn't mind if **Jaffee** came over. *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *Looking at a lot of the work at CRACKED, you were one of the first to use duo-tone. I don't think MAD used it.*

JERRY: You mean Craft-tint? We don't use that anymore because after a year or so, it turns yellow. It's good for the moment — but goes bad pretty quick.

BILL: *You mentioned earlier that you're going to be in charge of CARTOONIST PROFILES?*

JERRY: Yes, **Judd Hurd** is going on, like, 78, and is a very active guy, but he wants to relinquish it rather slowly. He still wants to be a force there. I prefer to do illustrators, but he gets a lot of revenue from the syndicate, so he has to stick to the syndicates. The newspaper

"In the 1950s I hung around with Walt Kelly. He and

comic strip is vanishing in America. The artwork is terrible, just awful. You know those brochures you get at the supermarket? The kind with the guy with the big megaphone and it says BIG SALE, that type of artwork. The type of figures that have no personality.

BILL: *Right, I know what you mean, sort of like clip art. On the plus side, Bill Watterson is bringing back CALVIN AND HOBBES with half-page size work.*

JERRY: I could never get into CALVIN AND HOBBES because in the history of comic strips and comic books there have been so many day-dreaming kids. I think the best day-dreaming kid ever was **Julius Feiffer's** CLIFFORD. You're too young, you wouldn't remember, years ago they offerred THE SPIRIT in a special book in a certain section in the Sunday papers and CLIFFORD was always the back page. Clifford was this great kid who was compulsive and he always thought about the worst and then in the last panel nothing would ever happen that he always worried about. In the late 1950s I was really privileged to hang around with **Walt Kelly.**

BILL: *Wow! All these things going on in New Jersey and I wasn't around.*

JERRY: No, this was downtown. We had a favorite ale house that we'd stop off at and have a few. *(Laughter.)* He and **Ernie Kovacs** were the two most beautiful people I ever met in this business. When we first started MAD, as a magazine, we had to use people like **Wally Cox** and such, people who were names, because MAD meant nothing at the time. Once we became entrenched we didn't have to rely on that type of material anymore. I used to go to **Kovacs'** apartment on Central Park West and I'd go through all of the files and his scripts that he had on yellow paper. We tried to figure out what would stand up on the printed page, since so much of it was stand-up comic delivery.

The same with **Chevy Chase;** he came up to MAD one day. His father, **Ned Chase,** was president of New American Library, the company that did our paperbacks. **Ned Chase** called up **Bill Gaines** once and he said, "My kid thinks he's funny. Can I send him over?" *(Laughter.)* Bill called me into his office and said, "Look, **Ned Chase's** boy is coming over. Humor him, be nice, see if he has anything we can use." So he came up and he was very, very pleasant. He came up and did like six minutes of stand-up comic stuff. I told him, "Chevy, it sounds great on your feet, but we can't give it the delivery and the inflection on paper." He kept coming back for nine or ten months and finally he did one page, a back cover, on MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE. It was illustrated in color by none other than **John Cullen Murphy,** who's been doing PRINCE VALIANT since **Hal Foster** died. It was amazing, it was our MIDNIGHT COWBOY issue and **Murphy** and **Chase** were getting credit on our back cover.

And then **Jon Voight** came up and he wanted to draw for MAD. He went to a Catholic university as an art student and later he sort of moved into drama. He said, "I'd love it if you'd give me a page." **Al Feldstein** was around at the time and I told him **Jon Voight** stopped by and he wanted to do a page for us. Al said, "What would we do, give him the gag and have him draw it?" I said sure, we could have a celebrities corner; we could get **Martin Landau;** he was a comic-book artist. I tried to get **Voight** involved but he was away out in the boondocks filming DELIVERANCE. We never did get John to do anything and the entire project was put on the back burner.

We had a lot of fun at MAD and met a lot of celebrities who were very nice. **David Jansen** wanted the originals from THE FUGITIVE. Bill wouldn't give away original art so he said to give him some blow-ups of it. It just happened I was going out to the West Coast at the time, so we got together out there. I remember he was working on THE FUGITIVE and getting make-up on at 5:30 in the morning and not getting home until ten at night. Doing motion pictures is a very grueling life. He used to send me to his house and I'd have dinner with his wife and her two teen-age daughters from a previous marriage. He'd come in and just by-pass the dining room because he was so tired.

When we were downtown at 225 Lafayette, there was an old building where **Bill Gaines'** father had started out in the comic-book business. We got a lot of business there but it was a real dump. We used to say it was done in twentieth century penitentiary. We eventually moved to Third Avenue and then to Madison. We got more visitors when we were in the dump than in the fancy place!

BILL: *I have to tell you it was a little hard finding the entrance.*

JERRY: Here?

BILL: *I had to come in the back door of*

Ernie Kovacs were the most beautiful people I ever met."

the bank.

JERRY: There's a big sign hanging on the building. Anyway, ask me what you want; I've digressed enough.

BILL: *Digressions are perfectly wonderful, because I'd have to fake it otherwise. You'll be staying with CRACKED after you go to CARTOONIST PROFILES?*

JERRY: I don't know yet. It all depends on how much time it takes up. The interviews involve a lot of time and sometimes a lot of travel.

BILL: *I guess they can't afford to live in New York?*

JERRY: I don't know. I think that New Jersey was always a haven for artists and painters. I think they like the suburban atmosphere of New Jersey, but yet they're still close enough to run over to New York and then run right back.

BILL: *I guess that would be a change of thought for people who picture New Jersey as nothing but oil refineries and tankers.*

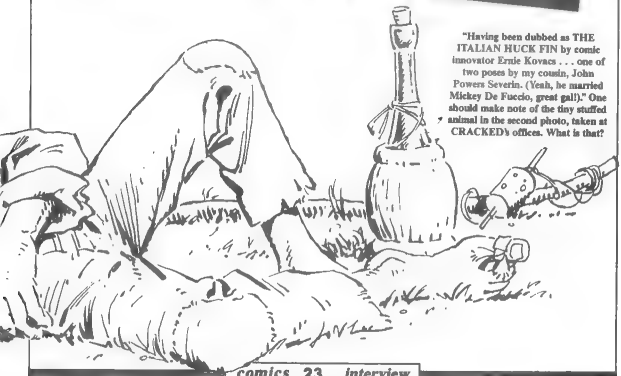
JERRY: There are a lot of illustrators that live in Rumpsun, New Jersey.

BILL: *Right, that's where Cher just bought her new house. I'd pay fifty bucks to move her furniture in for her.* (Laughter.)

JERRY: A lot of artists settled in near the Washington Bridge-Fort Lee-Englewood area. They like to be close to New York in order to deliver their work.

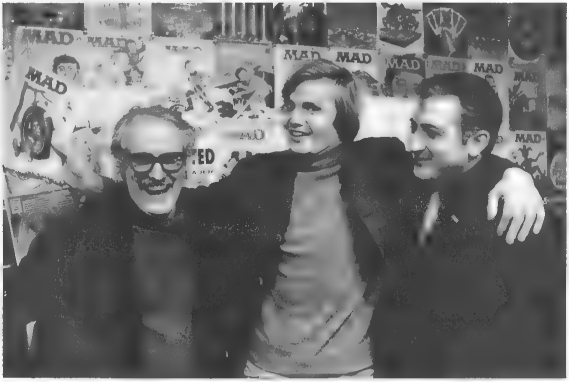
BILL: *It's also easier to pick up work*

Photos by BILL KIEFFER



"Having been dubbed as THE ITALIAN HUCK FIN by comic innovator Ernie Kovacs . . . one of two poses by my cousin, John Powers Severin. (Yeah, he married Mickey De Fuccio, great gal)." One should make note of the tiny stuffed animal in the second photo, taken at CRACKED's offices. What is that?

"My father — by today's values, he tore up about



$200,000 worth of my comics. He did it for my own good."

Previous page: two early photos from the MAD offices, circa 1970. Top: Art director John Putnam; actor John Voight; and Jerry. Bottom: Mr. De Fuccio discusses MAD material with Frank Frazetta, painter/ illustrator extraordinaire. Here: Jerry, in yet another MAD costume, circa 1950.

when you live in an area where you can bump into somebody who could give you an assignment.

JERRY: You know, Wednesday was always the traditional day when the one-panel cartoonists would come into town and show off their work.

BILL: *Pay day at Marvel and DC, right?* (Laughter.)

JERRY: I wouldn't know about that; the only work I ever did for DC was when I did a few war stories with **Reed Crandall** for **Joe Kubert**. Actually, **Joe Kubert** and **Alex Toth** got me into the business. I was in pre-med at the time . . .

BILL: *Another case of corruption by comics people.*

JERRY: Right, but they don't want to take the blame for it. *(Laughter.)* This was going back to 1948 and we've remained good friends over all those years. I used to go over and watch those guys work. My father was a doctor — by today's values he must have torn up about $200,000 of my comics. I keep telling my mother we'd be on Easy Street today, but she would say how Dad always wanted me to study and that he did it for my own good. Just think, I could have been a doctor with a great comic-book collection today! *(Laughter.)* My dad would say, "Isn't the Sunday paper good enough for you?" They were family comics and I couldn't stand them. I liked avenger types, guys with masks and capes and such. On Sundays we'd have people over, magistrates, doctors, surgeons, and my father used to say to me, "These are good people." I used to think, why can't we get a comic-book artist over once in awhile? *(Laughter.)*

My dad hated comics. I used to sneak

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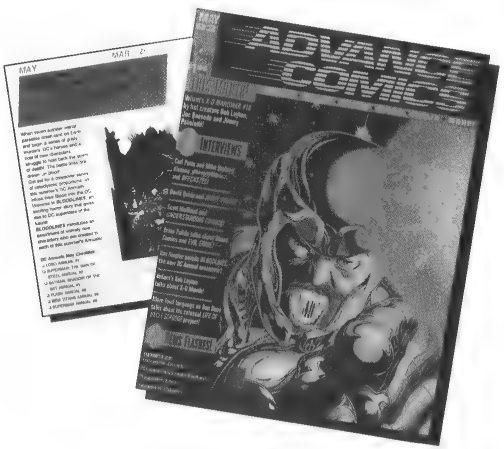

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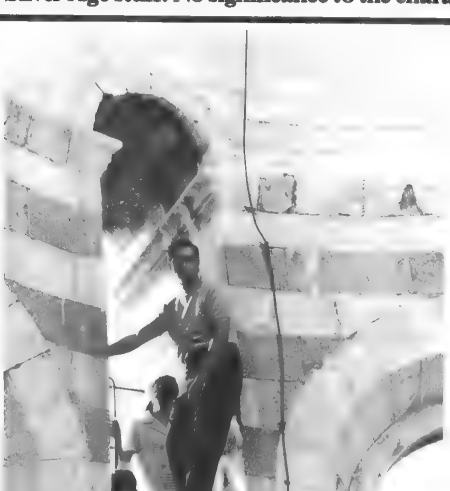
"I hate Silver Age stuff. No significance to the characters."

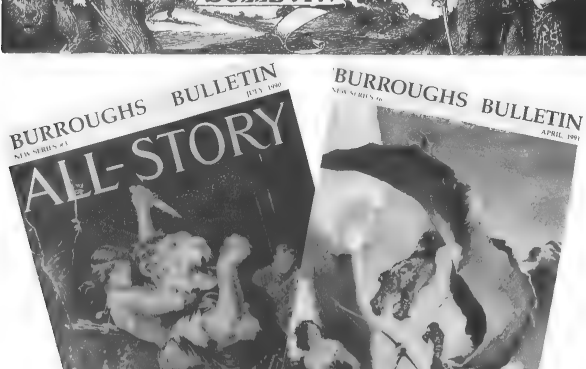


comics into the house. I can remember Dad coming out of his examining room with his stethoscope around his neck and he would frisk me — looking for comics. I finally devised a plan to sneak them into the house. When Mom would send me out for a loaf of Italian bread they always came in wrappers with gondolas or the Tower of Pisa pictured on them. I'd take the comic and wrap it around the loaf of bread and casually walk into the house. I remember one time my father caught me straightening out all of the comics I had hidden under my mattress and he took all of them from me.

You know, the vintage comics, the Golden Age stuff, the early stuff, had positive characters in their books. I hate the Silver Age stuff. Today there's just no significance to the characters. There's just too damn many of them. I asked my pal C.C. Beck to recreate some of his covers for me and he enlarged them fifty percent. He improved the coloration. After a cover is printed on the press thousands of times the covers start to dull up. He did his Bulletman for me and his Captain Marvel. He did such a great job that I asked him to do some other artists' covers for me. I thought maybe he wouldn't want to do another artist, but he said he could imitate any style. I wish I had enough room in my house to display all of the covers.

BILL: *It sounds like it would make a great coffee-table book.*

JERRY: Well, I'm a little late on that. So many people are already putting out stuff like that. I always wondered what the



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"The guys I sold strips to always published the clinkers."

allure was of these vintage comic books. I can remember the occasion when I bought each one: I should have been studying for a Latin test. I can remember every comic and how I sneaked each one into the house. The endless story is that I had that book but my mom threw it out. My brother lost all of his baseball cards. Important ones from the fifties like **Mickey Mantle.** Mom just threw them all out when he got married. Now I'm afraid to throw anything away. I guess I'll shut up and answer some of your questions.

BILL: *Tell us how you ended up at CRACKED.*

JERRY: I was dismissed in 1980 by **Bill Gaines.** For the next ten years I worked freelance at home, which was a bad experience, because at home there was no exchange. I kept in touch with **Lou Silverstone,** who was my roommate and buddy on all of those MAD trips. You heard about those, right?

BILL: *Not really. Tell us about them.*

JERRY: Bill took the entire gang of male contributors, writers, artists, whatever on fabulous trips every year. All expenses paid, too. We went all over. I'm surprised you never heard about it.

BILL: *I've been locked in the basement for twenty years.*

JERRY: Oh, I see. One year we went to England, Denmark, Russia and Holland. All in one trip in seventeen days. He took us to Spain, French Polynesia, Africa — we always went first-class. Lou was always my roommate because he said the right thing. He said that editors get the bathroom first. *(Laughter.)* I must say that the trips were the highlight of my career at MAD.

BILL: *That's interesting because in MAD they always have jokes about Gaines hoarding his art bin and being a little on the cheap side.*

JERRY: Bill was very generous with his trips. And, you know, you could borrow money from him; he'd give you a loan of a thousand. He'd never write down a due date; you'd give it back to him when you had it. He was very, very generous in that respect.

BILL: *Getting back to your freelance work . . .*

JERRY: Right, I was writing the adds for syndicated strips, mostly kids' strips. I had never cultivated that area before, and it took a lot of work and I had to write three or four. The ones I liked never sold. I used to work up an even dozen or so and I'd always throw in a few clinkers. The guys I supplied the strips to always picked out the clinkers to publish. It was tough freelancing because I had never been out in the cold before. Then Lou

"I SEE THAT HIS BLOODY-SOAKED HAND IS A'HOLDIN' HIS INSIDES INSIDE. I TELL THE INTER'PRETUR TO ASK HIM IF THE WOUND IS DEEP, NOT KNOWIN' WHAT TO ASK ON SECH AN OCCASION..."
"THE INTER'PRETUR PUTS IT TO HIM IN PUSHTU DIALECT: 'IS THE WOUND DEEP?'..."
"THE PORE BLOODY DIVIL ANSWERS IN PUSHTU. THE INTER'PRETUR TELLS ME IN ENGLISH. HE SAYS, 'TIS NOT DEEP AS A WELL NOR WIDE AS A CHURCH-DOOR..."

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"We'd finish one story and then we'd go on to

These two pages: Various material from an unsold property created by Jerry and Mart Bailey, circa 1972 — ALIAS . . . THE OWL. Art for this portrait of Jerry is by SPY VS. SPY writer/artist Antonio Prohias. Next page art was used for a GRAPHIC STORY magazine cover.

another era, and it never got boring or repetitious."

called me up and said that there was an opening for an editor at CRACKED. Lou suggested that we go in together and share the duties. That was in June of 1991. We're developing some young artists. The magazine business is pretty bad at this time. In fact, I think New York is in trouble. Who's going to buy magazines when they have to put bread on the table? Globe is okay because they have BRIDAL GUIDE and they have the scandal sheets in the supermarkets.

BILL: *Would you care to talk about those EC war stories you worked on?*

JERRY: Sure. They were a lot of fun. **Harvey Kurtzman** and I used to go to the library and do a lot of research because he was a stickler for accuracy. We would always go to the American History room which was headed by one **Mr. Vigilante.** *(Laughter.)* I always loved his name. Harvey and I would get involved with one phase of the research and we'd get so involved that Harvey would remind me that we weren't there to have fun, we were there to do research. You'd get so involved in all of the stuff on hand that you'd forget why you went there in the first place. Harvey was a very good tutor, I guess you could say. We also had **Wally Wood** and **John Severin. George Evans** also did World War One material; airplanes were his specialty. I felt very fulfilled with TWO FISTED TALES and FRONTLINE COMBAT. We'd finish one story and then we would go on to another era or another phase and it never got boring or repetitious.

Harvey was such a stickler for accuracy. He would always say never to copy a weapon from someone else's drawing. One day we were doing a Korean War story and he came in with a cast iron replica of a Mauser, a gun that was being used by the Koreans at the time. He told me to get down to the train station and rush it to **Wally Wood** so that he can draw it into the piece he was working on. I put it in a paper bag and ran down to the train station right at rush hour. As I was standing on the train, holding the strap, the damn thing fell out of the bag and onto the floor. Everybody on the train turned into statues.*(Laughter.)*

BILL: *So you told them it was okay, that you were a professional comic artist.* (Laughter.)

JERRY: I just scooped it up and put it back into the paper bag. I think that was one of my greatest experiences with

"I grew up with the notion that the cover should be like a

HAVING LEFT NIGHTSHADE FOR THE POLICE, THE OWL WINGS HOMEWARD...
YOU'RE BURNING THE MIDNIGHT E.A.R.L. WITH YOURS, UNRULY, EARL "BASHLING" BROOKS... AND HERE'S A NEWS BULLETIN...
THE CITY POLICE HAVE THE ELUSIVE (HERETOFORE) JEWEL THIEF, NIGHTSHADE IN CUSTODY. THERE IS A RUMOR THAT THE EQUALLY ELUSIVE OWL IS INVOLVED...
BRAVO, OWL! NOW LET'S GET BACK TO THE IMPEACHABLES WITH THEIR LATEST HIT, "ALL ALONE BY THE SOUSAPHONE"...
JERRY DE FUCCIO MART BAILEY
JUST TESTING OUT THE NEW NIGHT PURSUIT SHIP, AUSTIN.
BIL DAD, STILL UP...?
JERRY DE FUCCIO MART BAILEY
SON, YOUR EDITOR CALLED FIVE TIMES THIS WEEK'S STRIP ON THE BURGLARIES IS DUE, YOU KNOW...
I'M CROPPING THE DEADLINE...I DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE THE EPISODE "CONTINUED NEXT WEEK."
SO...?
SO...I WROTE "THE END" TO NIGHTSHADE THIS WEEK.
CARTOONIST AUSTIN POWELL, (ALIAS THE OWL) CONFERS WITH HIS SYNDICATE BOSS, J. D. STRIVER.
THIS IN THE NAME OF THE LAW SEQUENCE, THE CAPTURE OF NIGHTSHADE, IS GRIPPING, TENSE, MEMORABLE...
YOU SEEM TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE OWL THAN ANYBODY!
HOW ABOUT THAT WEEK OFF IN BARBADOS, J.D.? I'M CAUGHT UP NOW!
AUSTIN, I HEY! THE LIGHTS...!
THE WHOLE CITY'S GONE BLACK! WHAT'S GOING ON...?
JERRY DE FUCCIO MART BAILEY

Three days worth of the proposed comic strip ALIAS . . . THE OWL by Jerry and Mart.

working on the war books.

Then there was the time I was sent up to New London, Connecticut, to ride on the submarine. I was making $30 a day and the officer of the day on the training submarine said we were going to go 40 miles out on Long Island Sound and we're going to submerge. I told him my editor never mentioned that to me and that I was to come up and listen to the AAAAOOOGA, AAAAOOOGA, and all of the bells and claxons. I had no idea I was going to make a dive. The officer had me sign a release and I'm signing my life away. *(Laughter.)* It turned out to be a great experience. When we were under water it was so placid. It was wonderful.

Years later when the astronauts went up for the first time I didn't get much of a kick out of it because I had such reverence for the sub-mariner types.

Anyway, while we're submerged they asked me what I would like for lunch, so I came up with something impossible. I told them I'd like a Waldorf salad. So we went into the mess and they opened up a hatch where all of the food stuff was and they actually made me a Waldorf salad. Harvey knew I had a big collection of submarine books and it was sort of like being in overdrive having to go up there. I remember seeing the bunks where the crew slept, right over the torpedoes.

I really didn't want to go at first and Harvey said, "I know you have a lot of books on the subject so don't lie about going up there. I already made an appointment with the officer of the day." He told me to call him from there when I was finished. Instead I sent him a telegram that said, "Many brave hearts are asleep in the deep, glub, glub." When I came back Harvey did the layouts and I wrote the story, "Silent Service," which **Jack Davis** illustrated. Those were war books!

Unfortunately, that whole inquiry — the crimes investigation of the industry — was under way. **Dr. Wertham's** book, SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT, hit Bill more than any other company. Our horror stuff was so beautifully done. It wasn't done just for the sake of gore. When the other companies jumped on the bandwagon their covers were so brutal. They weren't subtle at all.

BILL: *They took lessons from the pulps, I guess.*

JERRY: Well, apparently they saw our sales figures and saw that our horror books were doing so well. It reflected on Bill, because he was considered the progenitor of that genre. Our stories had some substance to them and had that **O. Henry** ending to them. Eventually the books couldn't get code approval, so all he had left was MAD comics. At the time Bill went magazine-size with it, which helped get it off of the

poster, discernable from afar because it's very readable."

comics rack. That in itself, back then, was inspirational.

BILL: *Have you been happy with the EC reprints?*

JERRY: I don't own any of those. I do see them at a friend's house who collects them.

BILL: *If you had a chance to go back on a war book, would you?*

JERRY: My mind is not as flexible anymore. When I was working on a war story I would, for some unexplainable reason, I would get ideas for three or four more stories. It was sort of contagious. My mind is no longer that pliable. At this stage I can't be more than an editor.

BILL: *What about your take on the current comics industry?*

JERRY: I don't understand it because it's all death and destruction. The covers are so overworked. I was looking at a GREEN LANTERN cover just this morning and I threw it in the trash. I grew up with the concept that the cover should be like a poster and that it should be discernable from afar. At CRACKED we do a lot of white backgrounds because it's very readable.

These young cartoonists think you have to put a carnation in a button hole; they don't leave a square inch open. That isn't the concept of comic books. The concept was that the drawn figure was to be a chalice for color. When **C.C. Beck** did his Captain Marvel it was almost coloring-book outline stuff. The color was what held the entire thing together. That was the idea behind doing comic books. Nowadays they not only clutter up the covers but also the interior artwork.

All of the old-timers were my idols and fortunately when I would look them up they were very gracious to me. I loved when it was a package job — even if the guy didn't do the writing, he did the lettering and art. Even if they didn't sign their work you could discern their particular styles. Today it's ridiculous, they have six or seven guys working on the same story and it's not the same — the quality doesn't come through.

When I was in high school, I loved a book by **Charlie Biro.** He did one of the most successful comics of all time back in the 1940s, CRIME DOES NOT PAY. Generally, back in those days, the artist did practically everything. A good example would be **Bill Everett,** who created THE SUB-MARINER. There was no mistaking his style. In the early days **Mickey Spillane** did a lot of comic scripts.

BILL: *So do you still read comics?*

Two "fan" letters from the desk of one Jerry De Fuccio.

October 13, 1972

Mr. Jerry De Fuccio
Associate Editor
MAD Magazine
485 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10022

Dear Mr. De Fuccio:

Enclosed is the picture you requested for MAD Magazine.

I have only one thing to say:

"Ti offro un affare che non puoi rifiutare."

Best,

James Caan

JC/lrs

Enclosure: 1

CHARLES M. SCHULZ
2162 COFFEE LANE
SEBASTOPOL, CALIFORNIA

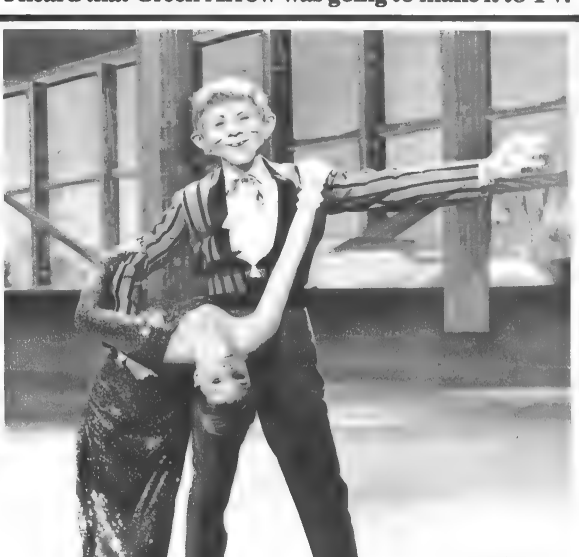
June 7

Dear Jerry,
The Mad Sunday Comic Section is great. I would have felt terrible if you had left me out.

Best regards,
Charles Schulz

"I heard that Green Arrow was going to make it to TV."

Photo: Gerald Smith



Fred Astaire as Alfred E. Neuman, for "An Evening with Fred Astaire" for NBC Television. The dancer is Barrie Chase. Her father, Border Chase, wrote [illegible] such as HIS MAJESTY O'KEEFE.

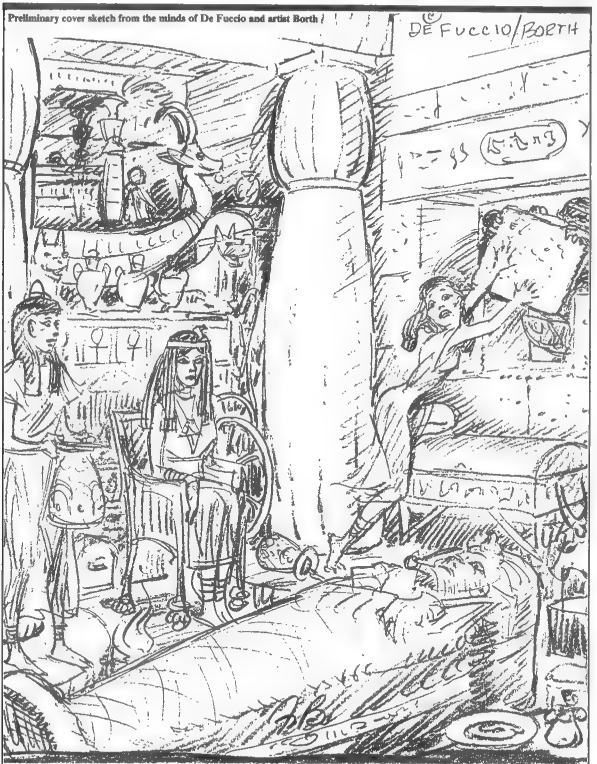
JERRY: I skip through them. I don't recognize any of the names because most of the old-timers are gone.

BILL: *What do you think about the gimmicks they're using to promote comics: multiple covers, holograms, etc.?*

JERRY: Well, I guess direct sales are responsible for the large number of titles being produced. It seems like Hollywood and TV have taken an interest in comics. I heard that GREEN ARROW was going to make it to TV. Who knows, after what happened to the FLASH series. It's hard to say. I understand ROCKETEER was a real dud; the problem with ROCKETEER was that they had too many inside jokes from the '30s that this generation couldn't

About the mascot: "As a janitor, he looked rather archaic."

Preliminary cover sketch from the minds of De Fuccio and artist Borth



understand.

BILL: *Tell me a little about the mascot for CRACKED.*

JERRY: We changed him. He wears a baseball cap . . .

BILL: *He's not a janitor anymore?*

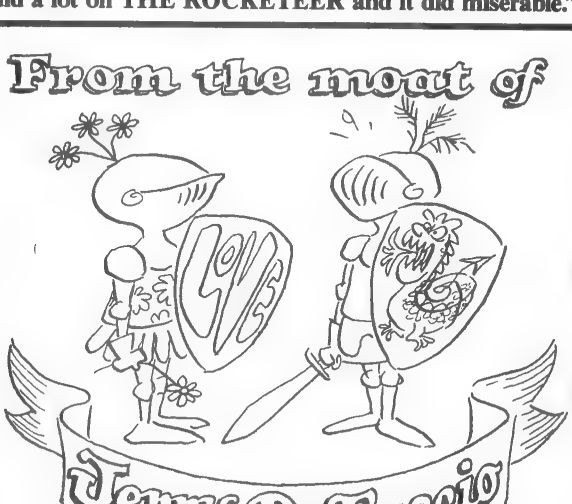
JERRY: No, he's not a janitor anymore. He looks better in a baseball cap. As a janitor he looked rather archaic.

BILL: (Looking at some artwork.) *Here he's dressed in a STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION uniform.*

"We have an instinct for what will do well. *(Laughter.)* We

Here: Severin art for a series of elaborate "Thank you" cards prepared to be given to MAD publisher Bill Gaines.
Next page: Letterhead art by Jack Kent.

did a lot on THE ROCKETEER and it did miserable."



JERRY: We thought we would outfit him for the occasion. The concept of the janitor was rather fuddy-duddy. The NEXT GENERATION was for the science fiction special. We did a survey in the **Michael Jordan** issue: What type of movies do you see, what do you read, that sort of thing. It was really amazing; we received over two thousand responses.

BILL: *That's amazing! That's a greater response than SPORTS ILLUSTRATED receives from their swimsuit issue. You mentioned the survey — how do you determine, for example, what movies you're going to parody?*

JERRY: Hmm, well, we sort of have an instinct for what is going to do well. We did a lot on THE ROCKETEER *(Laughter.)* and that did miserable. In fact, I called **Dave Stevens** and I wanted him to do a cartoon of himself tearing up the issue for our letters page. Unfortunately, I never got past his phone answering machine and he didn't have the grace to call me back.

BILL: *I guess he was kind of busy during that time period.*

JERRY: Well, I don't know what he was busy at. The box-office returns were very poor. I think a follow-up on THE ROCKETEER is as viable as seeing a Hindenberg II.

BILL: *Wrapping this up, is there anything you would like to say about the future of comics and the industry as a whole?*

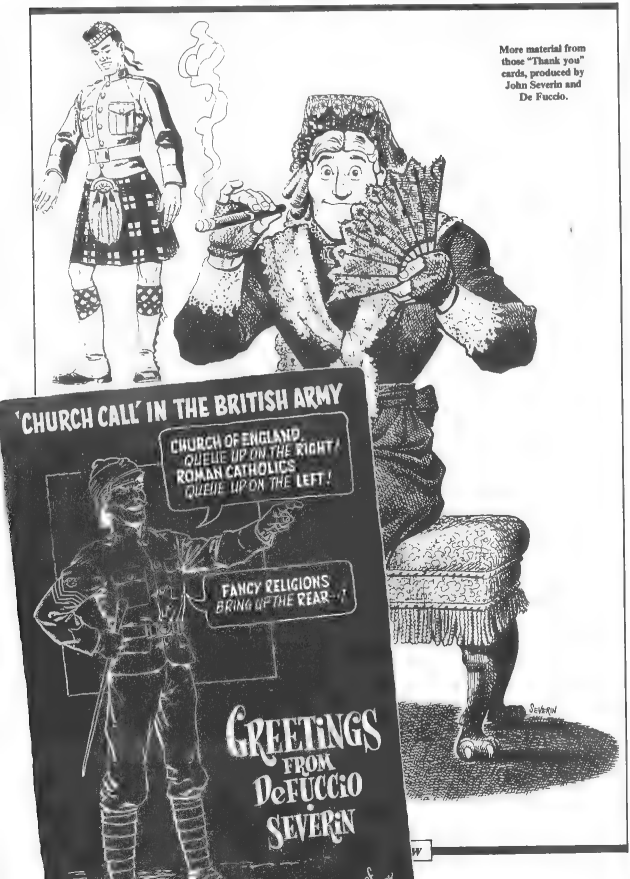
JERRY: Gee, I don't expect to be around too much longer myself — I'm going on 67, you know. When I was in pre-med we used to get one of those well-bred cats to dissect. They were raised in New Orleans and had a good life, well fed and all of that. We had to take some cells out of them and look at them under a microscope. I would draw everything with great detail — I was a frustrated cartoonist back then. My professor would say to me, "Jerry, all you have to do is a rough drawing; the labels are what counts — why don't you go work for Disney?" *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *Any regrets about leaving medical school?*

JERRY: Sure, you have to get a profession in this life. It's very tough no matter how great the set up. It was great at MAD; it was what you'd call a family set-up. The set-up is good here, too. If there is such a thing as reincarnation, I'd like to come back as a doctor. Knowing my luck, if there is such a thing as reincarnation, I'll come back as myself.

"I'd like to see some bright lights come up in comics.

More material from those "Thank you" cards, produced by John Severin and De Fuccio.


'CHURCH CALL' IN THE BRITISH ARMY
CHURCH OF ENGLAND, QUEUE UP ON THE RIGHT!
ROMAN CATHOLICS QUEUE UP ON THE LEFT!
FANCY RELIGIONS BRING UP THE REAR!!
GREETINGS FROM DeFUCCIO SEVERIN

Everybody says do something different, but it's the same."

Jerry De Fuccio is knocked out for this MAD T-shirt ad. Associate editor Nick Meglin is the victor and Al Feldstein is the ring announcer.

There doesn't seem to be anything new in comics today. All the origin stories are the same. They were fresh in high school — someone got hit by a bolt of lightning, that sort of thing. Nothing new under the solar system, right? Recently we were shocked to hear that Northstar was gay. I just think that there are too many characters today and nothing to make them interesting. I'm a purist; give me a guy whose gimmick is fire or ice, or stretching like Plastic Man.

I should mention that I went to Quality Comics when I was in high school. I went to a Catholic school and we had off; the public school kids didn't. I figured there wouldn't be too many kids around, so I went over to Quality and I got to meet **Jack Cole.**

Those were exciting times for comics. I'd like to see some bright lights come up in comics. Everybody keeps saying give us something different, but it's all the same.

"I made Clark Kent . . . well, reviews have called me

GARY JACKSON

It's a satisfying feeling
When you hang up your cape
To know that you've averted
Murder, larceny and rape

Lyrics from "Doing Good," from IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE, IT'S SUPERMAN.

Despite the fact that Superman has remained one of the planet Earth's most popular fictional characters for more than half a century, only a handful of actors have played the role. Notable among them are Bud Collyer on radio and in cartoons, Kirk Alyn in movie serials, George Reeves on television, Bob Holiday on Broadway and, of course, Christopher Reeve in feature films. To the ranks of these few must be added the name of Gary Jackson, the Superman of the 1990s — and of the 1960s, in a sense. He's starring in the revival of the 1966 musical comedy IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE, IT'S SUPERMAN, at the Godspeed Opera House in East Haddam, Connecticut, which is being performed as a period piece. The original production debuted March 29, 1966, a

All photos by Diane Sobolewski

Fellow DAILY PLANET reporters Clark Kent, aka Superman (played by Gary Jackson), and Lois Lane (Kay McClelland) in the musical comedy IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE, IT'S SUPERMAN, the opening production of he Goodspeed Opera House's 1992 season. Next page: Gary makes a fast change into his second stage identity — SUPERMAN!

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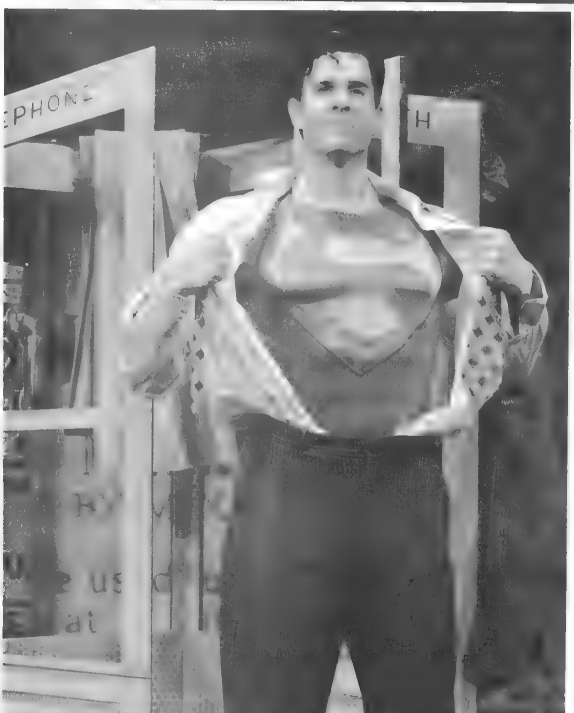
'goofy,' 'bumbling.' I took him in the direction of a clod."



scant two months after the spectacularly successful BATMAN TV series bowed on ABC. Broadway director Harold Prince attributed the critically-praised show's brief, four-month run to the fact that it ended up following, rather than leading, the Pop Art craze of the day.

The Godspeed production — and Jackson's performance, in particular — has earned a review peppered with superlatives from Michael Kuchwara, drama critic for the Associated Press wire service. With book by David Newman and Robert Benton (the pair who worked on the screenplay for the 1978 film SUPERMAN), music by Charles Strouse and lyrics by Lee Adams (the pair who created the 1960 Broadway musical BYE BYE BIRDIE), the new production also boasts the talents of director Stuart Ross and actress/singer

"The show approaches Superman as a being first, and

Kay McClelland, most recently seen in Broadway's CITY OF ANGELS, as Lois Lane. Jackson's own stage credits include BENT, THE HEIDI CHRONICLES, A CHRISTMAS CAROL and the title role of THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW (twice, in separate productions).

The Broadway musical and the comic book are both indigenous and original creations — each ridiculed, each swimming in its own weird conventions and each infused with an optimistic energy which bespeaks the American spirit. Please join us now as these two distinctly American art forms — the Broadway musical and the comic-book superhero — shake hands once again . . .

DAN HAGEN: *Superman, I presume?*

GARY JACKSON: Well, yeah. Eight shows a week. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Is this a role you had ever considered playing before?*

GARY: Actually, no, not one that I have

The villainous Dr. Abner Sedgwick (played by Gabriel Barre) holds Lois Lane (McClelland) captive on his torture wheel as Superman (Jackson) comes to the rescue — stage left!!

Clark Kent as a creation of his — a disguise he creates."

ever thought of playing. I mean, how many people get to play Superman in their lifetime?

DAN: *Well, only about a half-dozen.*

GARY: It's quite an experience, I have to admit

DAN: *Tell me about it.*

GARY: It has been great fun. Donning

that suit and flying over the audience is an experience I don't think many actors will ever get to experience.

DAN: *It's got to be a kick, right?*

GARY: It is a kick, and also just the audience support. First of all, you fly over the audience and everybody is like, "Who is this guy going to be? Who's this guy think he is, trying to play Superman?" But I think we eventually win them over. After the first couple of numbers, they start to feel a little more comfortable with me, and accept me. And by the end of the show, they're with me, which is nice.

DAN: *Part of the point, I guess, is that everybody in America has an idea of who Superman is. So you sort of have something to live up to.*

GARY: That was the hardest part about coming into this role. And one of the most terrifying things for me is that everybody has a preconceived idea of who he is, who he should be.

DAN: *And it's very dear to their little American hearts.*

GARY: It really is. He's the American icon. Also, we had the very visible Superman of the '80s, Christopher Reeve.

DAN: *Who happens to be a very good actor himself . . .*

GARY: Yes. And he really did define Superman.

DAN: *I think so, too. A lot of people talk about George Reeves on the TV series and so forth, but after I saw the first SUPERMAN movie, I thought,* "This *is the definitive version of the character."*

GARY: Yeah, it really was.

DAN: *So you're coming up against that here. How did you approach the role?*

GARY: One of the things with the role, and with the show, that's different is that the show approaches Superman as a being first, and Clark Kent as a creation of his — a disguise that he creates. And I don't think that he takes himself quite as seriously as he did in, say, the movie or the **George Reeves** series or any of those. That's the approach that I took. He understands what he is. He's walking around in a big, blue suit and flies through the air and stops crime. I think he realizes that, "Okay, this is a little absurd, but it's what I do. It's my job."

DAN: *Right. That's one of the songs, isn't it?*

GARY: Right. "Doing Good." And that's how I approached it. I took and said, "Okay, he's going to be someone who looks at himself — as well as having this mission to do good and to be the savior of the planet — and puts it all in perspective, realizes exactly who he is and how he fits into this world.

DAN: *What about the dual role thing? Is that fun, is that a challenge, or . . .?*

GARY: It's a challenge, both physically and mentally. I kind of made Clark Kent . . . well, some of the reviews have called me "goofy," "bumbling." I took him more in the direction of a clod. *(Laughter.)* The opposite of what Superman is.

DAN: *Now, as I recall from reading something about the play way back when, when it was on Broadway, in this version Clark is something like the lowly shipping clerk . . .*

GARY: Well, he writes the shipping news.

DAN: *So he's really low on the rungs at THE DAILY PLANET, as opposed to Lois, who's way up there.*

GARY: And he really is. He's walking into things, and he's always being put down by the hierarchy in THE PLANET

DAN: *And a great emphasis on the classic relationship, what Jules Feiffer called "the schizoid, chaste* menage a trois." *Lois worships Superman and despises Clark, etc.*

GARY: Right. Well, Clark and Lois are friends in this one. She doesn't despise him like they did in the original comic strip, but she just doesn't deal with him. She just kind of dismisses him. She doesn't hate him, but she doesn't include him in her circle. And the schizoid personality of Superman and Clark has been interesting to approach as well . . .

DAN: *You get to play two roles in the same show?*

GARY: Yeah, you really do. But there's also that underlying, where he always is aware, as Superman, of what is going on. Which has been fun

DAN: *This is the bit where you're sort of communicating to the audience, though the other characters on stage aren't supposed to know, right?*

GARY: We really do let them in on the secret, and also, at some points of the show, we acknowledge the audience. "Hey, we know you know, and I know." *(Laughter.)* The other people that I am on stage with don't know. So we let them know that we are aware that they are intelligent, as well.

DAN: *A little bit like HARVEY or one of the other fantasy plays, you know?*

GARY: Right, right

DAN: *Cute. How does it feel to fly?*

GARY: Well, sometimes it's terrifying. Because we have had minor mishaps, and it's just been things mechanical — if we have power surge or something.

"Superman really needs people as much as they need him."

DAN: *Is it all electrically controlled, then?*

GARY: Actually, we have three different lines, three different flying apparatuses on stage — which are run by three of my best friends in the wings! *(Laughter.)* They're pulling up and down on this rope. It's a comedy skit backstage, when they're trying to lift this 200-pound man off the ground. And then the track that flies over the audience is both electrical and mechanical. The up-and-down mechanism is electrical, and the traveling mechanism is all mechanical. It's done by a crank.

DAN: *Flying overhead, that must really impress the audience.*

GARY: We usually get applause on the flight in, and the flight out, as well. It is great fun and very exciting — especially for the people who sit in the seat right next to where I take off. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *You're right over their heads, eh?*

GARY: Yeah.

DAN: *Excellent. In addition to rehearsals, then, did that take a lot of work? I suppose there's all this extra technical stuff.*

GARY: It is probably the most technical show I've ever been in. It's unbelievably technical. I've been in more physical productions, but I've never been in one that had so many mechanical and technical things that I had to deal with — starting with the custome. I wear a harness under a muscle suit, which covers the harness so they can't see it, and then over that is a big, blue suit with the red S.

DAN: *All of which sounds like sweating bullets to me.*

GARY: Yes. Especially as the summer approaches. As the summer approaches, my weight drops. So that aspect has been very technical. And wearing a wool suit over the top of that as Clark Kent . . .

DAN: *Oh, god. Wool.*

GARY: Wool, yeah! *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *This is like it was planned as torture.*

GARY: I know. Some of my friends paid the designer.

DAN: *How old are you, if you don't mind my asking?*

GARY: I'm 30.

DAN: *So you're the perfect age. Superman's supposed to be 29, I believe. Tell me about the audience reaction. How did they take it opening night, how do they take it routinely, what do they like best?*

GARY: Well, it's funny because it changes from night to night. What we've found is that people walk in to the theatre expecting to see a children's show, and that's understandable.

DAN: *Sure.*

GARY: And the consistent reaction on the way out is, "It's not what I expected. It was great fun. It's not a kid's show at all." Although the kids are enjoying it . . .

DAN: *Nothing wrong with bringing them.*

GARY: Oh, yes. You should have seen this little boy at the stage door stairwell. It was one of the orchestra member's little boys, waiting for me to come down after the show. His eyes got as big as saucers. He was meeting Superman!

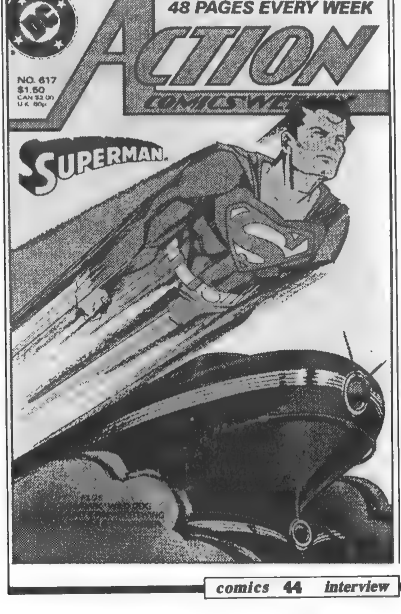
DAN: *How does it feel to be, in the eyes of a little guy, the real guy?*

GARY: Oh, I think I shatter a lot of illusions. *(Laughter.)* Whenever I come down, after I take off the costume, you see their little faces drop. Too much responsibility.

DAN: *Yeah. As I recall, too, from the original Broadway run of the play, there's this marvelous bit of the villain using psychiatric technique to blow Superman's self-esteem, basically.*

GARY: Yes. Well, that's part of the character — that Superman really needs the people as much as they need him. And he hasn't realized that himself.

Cover illustration by writer/artist Dean Motter. (Note, half-toning for this piece was achieved using computer scanning.)



We have been promising George Perez that we would print this unpublished "ad" piece ever since issue 104 of COMICS INTERVIEW. (This is but one of a couple of dozen pages we weren't able to fit into our "PEREZ QUITS DC!" issue — back issues available.)

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"Lois dumps him. She falls in love with another guy."

Pencil (detail) from SUPERMAN #431 by Erik "Savage Dragon" Larsen.

DAN: *I always thought that was an excellent plot device for that play. He's physically impervious, but you can hurt the guy psychologically.*

GARY: Well, it really brings out the human side of Superman, and brings out all of his insecurities and his fears. As well as the fact that Lois, in this show, kind of dumps him. She falls in love with another guy.

DAN: *Oh, that's right. Does she fall in love with the columnist, or . . .?*

GARY: She falls in love with the assistant of the villain, Dr. Sedgwick (**Gabriel Barre**). She leaves Superman, and so it makes him very vulnerable. By Act Two, he's a mess. Dealing with the Clark/Superman schism. "People like Clark, but people don't like Superman. What do I go for?" And then there's another character that enters in — Sidney.

DAN: *That was played by Linda Lavin, I think, on Broadway?*

GARY: Correct, and now it's played by **Jan Neuberger.** She falls for Clark. She has no idea that he's Superman, so there's this little aspect of, "Well, she likes me as Clark. What's wrong with that? Maybe I should just be Clark."

DAN: *And she sings that song, something about there's something inside of you . . .*

GARY: "You've Got Possibilities." Great tune.

DAN: *Yeah, it is. Of the music, what are your favorite numbers?*

GARY: I think my favorite number is a song called "Meanwhile," which is a version of "It's Superman" — the title song of the show. But it's done in comic-book squares. All the characters are in comic-book panels, singing this song, and Clark is the only one who steps out, as Clark, because he doesn't quite fit into this world. So everybody else is singing all of their own internal monologues and what's going on inside them, and Clark is listening to all this and dealing with all this. Wonderful music.

DAN: *"Meanwhile," of course, is the classic comic-book caption . . .*

GARY: Um hmm.

DAN: *Any solo that you have which you*

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"My final song in the show, 'Pow! Bam! Zonk!,' is fun."

like best?

GARY: My final song in the show, "Pow! Bam! Zonk!," is great fun.

DAN: *This is to the battle with the villains, right?*

GARY: Right. Singing the entire time, and singing all of the exclamations as well. It's very much like the BATMAN TV show.

DAN: *I recall seeing pictures of Bob Holiday from Broadway in which the villains are swinging something at Superman to hit him, and he flies up into the air to avoid it. Is there some of that, too?*

GARY: Not in that number, no. I do knock one of the Fahzumis, which are now the bad guys — formerly the Lings — into the air. And the ensemble member who does that does a flip in the air, and off stage.

DAN: *Excellent. This is, I presume, just after Superman recovers his self-confidence and he's back to being Superman again?*

GARY: Almost.

DAN: *Almost?*

GARY: Almost. He still can't fly, yet. He doesn't have all of his confidence back yet.

DAN: *Ah, I see. Flying by confidence. This sounds a lot like Peter Pan, doesn't it?*

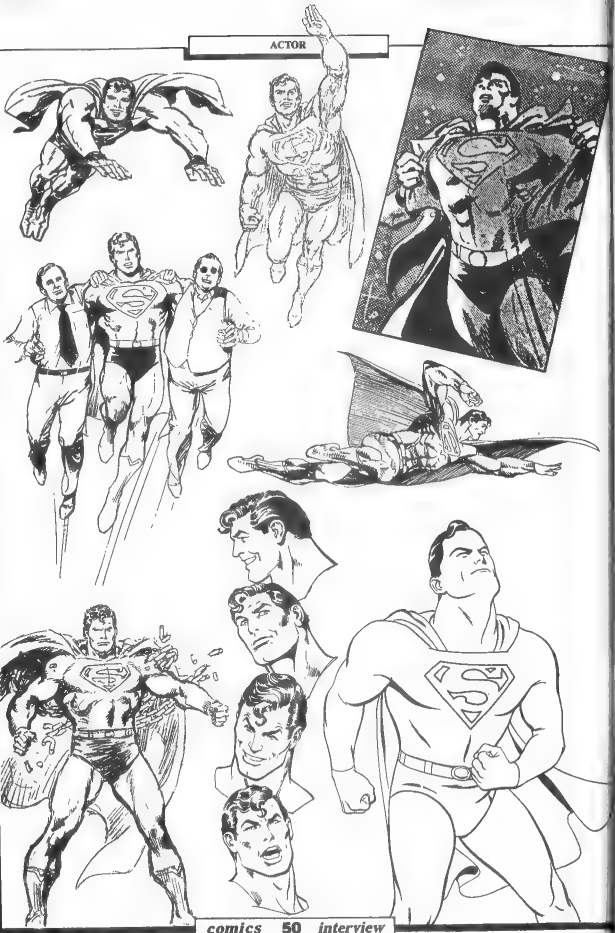
GARY: *(Laughter.)* Yes. Well, that's a little bit of what we dealt with.

DAN: *That's excellent. And the switch of the villains, too, from Red Chinese to some sort of Arab terrorists or something, right?*

GARY: Yes. They're kind of making them generic terrorists. Dealing with the Arab aspect of it, we've been trying to downplay that. It's a little more generic. We try not to make it racist.

DAN: *Sure, of course. It seems that whoever Americans think of as their chief enemy at the moment, Superman always has to go up against them —*

Another very rare piece from the board of Perez — pencil layouts from WAR OF THE GODS.



Superman art by (clockwise): Jack Kirby (San Diego program "detail" from '74), Curt Swan (commissioned), Eugene Colan (JEMM, SON OF SATURN #4), Alex Toth (SUPERMAN ANNUAL #9), Chuck Patton & Dick Giordano (AMAZING HEROES cover #79), Arthur Adams (ARMAGEDDON INFERNO #4), Kieth Giffen (ACTION COMICS 5563), Walter Simonson (special pin-up), John Byrne (his earliest), Joe Kubert (SUPERMAN #216), Steve Rude (warm-up), Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez (clip-art), John Buscema (SUPERMAN VS. HULK), Neal Adams (spot illo featuring Superman co-creators, Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster), Gil Kane (ACTION COMICS #554).

"In 1966, you couldn't take this American icon and

Superman (Jackson) comforts DAILY PLANET reporter Lois Lane (McClelland).

whatever era in history it is, you know?

GARY: What was it? One of the movies dealt with the Soviet Union. Whoever was the current enemy at the time.

DAN: *And of course Hitler. He bashed him a few times.*

GARY: That's right!

DAN: *Any chance of a cast recording?*

GARY: I don't know. There's been no mention of that.

DAN: *That would be great. Did you see the A.P review?*

GARY: Yes, I did.

DAN: *Michael Kuchwara's review. You know, that's going out nationally, and it was quite a rave. So I would think you guys have got a hit here, surely.*

GARY: It was very flattering. I was very impressed with it.

DAN: *You know, while the Broadway run was moderately successful, there was sort of a mixed reaction to it, I think. But this one seems to be rave and doing well. Why should the revival get a more favorable acceptance now, do you think?*

GARY: Well, I think we're a little more accepting of Superman. I think in 1966, you couldn't take this American icon and make fun of him, at all. I think it was a big no-no at that time to do that. And after going through the Vietnam era and the current state of the union, I think looking at that and taking a tongue-in-cheek approach to it and saying, "Okay, it has its flaws. We understand. He's not the perfect man." And making a little fun of him, I think it's acceptable now. I think people want to do that. We've been doing that for the last couple of decades. You know, we've been destroying our icons.

DAN: *True. But you don't destroy him completely, I presume.*

GARY: Oh, no, not at all. But we just put it into perspective.

DAN: *And the audience walks away feeling good, so . . .*

GARY: Yeah, they had a great time.

make fun of him. It was a big no-no at that time."

DAN: *Sort of think, too, it's what, 25 more years down the road here. Superman's even a more established icon than he was before, although he was very established then. And also maybe this was rather a new thing, to pull musicals from odd sources like comic books, in 1966. But now, after PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, after EVITA, after all these musicals which come from very strange places, indeed, do you think audiences are more willing to accept that now?*

GARY: Yeah, I think so. We've got LI'L ABNER, we've got DICK TRACY. We've got all of these different comic-book sources. It makes it more acceptable to see a comic-strip hero brought to life. The audiences say, "Okay, go ahead and do it, and we'll see how it works."

DAN: *Any chance of taking this on the road after the run's done there?*

GARY: I don't know. I haven't heard any talk of that. I've heard mentions of Japan or L.A.

DAN: *Well, Japan. They love Superman there.*

GARY: It's weird. We think it would be a great hit in Japan.

DAN: *For whatever reason, they have the same superhero fixation we have.*

GARY: It would be fun to do it in Japan, as well. I would love to go somewhere with it, but I don't know whether that's going to happen.

DAN: *It seems to me that you guys picked the perfect time to revive it. I understand some new songs have been written for this version?*

GARY: **Stroube** and **Adams** wrote, how many, three new songs for the show.

DAN: *Why would they want to go back to a work they'd done and add more songs? What prompted them to do that?*

GARY: From what I understand, they always liked this work. And they were never approached since 1966. I think there's been one production, since then.

DAN: *There was one on TV, you know, oddly enough. ABC did it as a one-time-only thing in the early '70s.*

GARY: Wasn't **Loretta Swit** in that?

DAN: *You're right, yeah.*

GARY: We've got one of the reviews of that floating around here somewhere. And they also cut it down quite a bit. You

Murphy Anderson brings DC's two powerhouses together.

I CAN'T CHOKE DO ANYTHING WHEN I CAN'T CHOKE BREATHE! IT'S THIS CHOKE POLLUTION!
SORRY! I GOT AN APPOINTMENT WITH MY SHRINK!
CAN'T COVER THE STORY NOW--BE LATE FOR MY WOMEN'S LIB MEETING!
WHAT SHOULD I WEAR TO THE END OF THE WORLD--A MINI--OR A MIDI?
MURPHY ANDERSON

"I was never a comic-book fan as a kid. I liked

DAILY PLANET columnist Max Mencken (left, Jamie Ross) joins forces with Dr. Abner Sedgwick (Barre) to destroy Superman.

know, Godspeed has such a great reputation for bringing things back to life and reviving things. I think since Godspeed approached **Strouse** and **Adams** — and Godspeed does have such a good relationship with **Charles Strouse,** with ANNIE — when Godspeed approached them and said, "Hey, we'd like to do this, and we'd like to fix it, and improve it a little bit," I don't think they could turn that down. We had all the writers out here except for **Robert Benton.**

DAN: *Which gives it a connection, too, to the films, because Benton and Newman had worked on the movies, right?*

GARY: Right.

DAN: *That's interesting. So Godspeed is sort of dedicated to preservation and revivals of American musical theatre, right?*

GARY: Yeah, and if they can add some new musicals to the American repertoire, then they do that.

DAN: *That's nice to see done. I always wonder about musicals like this one which you'd love to see, but no one ever does anymore.*

GARY: It is a good production. **Kay McClelland,** who's playing Lois Lane, is absolutely wonderful. I think she's the best thing in the show . . . *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *What's it like to work with her on stage?*

GARY: She's wonderful. Probably one of the most giving actresses I've worked with. She's always there, she's very open and she has a killer voice. In fact, she has one of the new songs in the show.

DAN: *Something called "It's Up to Me," where she's strapped to a buzz saw or something? What is this?*

GARY: It takes place in an abandoned

them, but it wasn't something that I dove into."

power station, so she's on one of the big power wheels for the turbine.

DAN: *What is the sense of the song? I take it "It's Up to Me" means that this is Lois's dedication to constantly getting in trouble and getting the story, or . . .?*

GARY: Yeah. She's dealing with the fact that this is the 16th time her life has been in danger, and why is she always relying on other people to save her? *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *I see. She's wondering about why she always ends up this way, eh?*

GARY: Yeah. Either she's Superman's Lois Lane or Max's (**Jamie Ross**) Lois Lane or Jim's (**John Shlappi**) Lois Lane. What happened to her own Lois Lane?

DAN: *Oh, it's the feminist take, 25 years later, in part. Neat.*

GARY: Right, right. It allows her to realize herself, and she's the one who brings Superman back. When he's lost in his fog and his internal struggle there, she's the one who sings his little vignette, "Every man has a job to do, and your job is doing good . . ." Back around.

DAN: *So it's a reprise of his song.*

GARY: Yeah. It's Lois who saves the day, actually.

DAN: *So from now on your resume, when you go to casting directors, will say, "SUPERMAN," eh?*

GARY: Superman/slash/Clark Kent. *(Laughter.)* I want to say "flying" under Special Assets.

DAN: *That should surely catch a few eyes, right?*

GARY: Yes. *(Laughter.)* "I can act in a muscle suit!"

DAN: *One more thing I did want to ask. Did you read comics or like this stuff, growing up?*

GARY: I was never a comic-book fan as a kid. I liked them, but it wasn't something that I dove into, that I spent all my time at the comic-book store.

DAN: *You probably remember the BATMAN TV series, right?*

GARY: Oh, yes! I was a big fan of that.

DAN: *Everybody was, in '66.*

GARY: Actually, they said that was one of the reasons that this show failed. It came out around the same time.

DAN: *I had that feeling, too, that maybe BATMAN just ate up all the enthusiasm for these characters that was to be had at that moment, you know?*

GARY: There was that attitude of, "What a knock-off." That it was a knock-off of the television.

DAN: *Even though the musical had been a long time in development itself, of course.*

GARY: And also, the original run was a critical success. It was a critical hit. All the reviews were very good, but it was the same thing that we're dealing with here. People don't know what kind of a show it is, whether it's a kid's show or whether it's an adult show. They had a hard time marketing it then, just as they do now.

Todd McFarlane's pin-up from SUPERMAN SPECIAL #1.

DAN: *Has the AP review appeared yet anywhere, do you know?*

GARY: I really haven't heard. I'm from Seattle originally, so I heard that they were maybe going to run it in the SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER, which would be great fun. But I haven't heard yet.

DAN: *I would think once that appears, you're going to start getting a lot of people from all over the country.*

GARY: I would love to see it printed, because it's so nice to me! *(Laughter.)*

LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

AYN RAND MEETS BATMAN

Dear DAK·

Here are my reactions to issue #111:

Wesley Strick: Pretty good; one of the most interesting interviews in the three issues. I'm surprised to learn that many, or at least a substantial minority, apparently found the first BATMAN movie (I mean the first one with **Michael Keaton**, not the 1960s **Adam West** movie) boring. I could see where people might not like it, but it's hard for me to imagine anyone finding it boring To me, the strong Romanticism of the film carried it along even when the plot was flawed. BATMAN RETURNS, on the other hand. . . *that* bored me; or rather, the last half of the movie bored me; the first half (the origin of the Penguin, the setting up of the Schreck-Catwoman storyline, and the fascinating "Catholic" overtones, as captured in the first view of Bruce Wayne in a cathedral-like Wayne Manor) was great.

ROBOCOP VS. TERMINATOR: That comic-book artist who once said COMICS INTERVIEW wasn't "art-oriented" enough certainly couldn't say that about issue #111, what with the pages and pages of **Walt Simonson** art that accompanied this piece. I forget who interviewed **Simonson** when his THOR was the cover story on your "god-sized issue" #9, but I remember when I was editing that interview how distinct and unique a "voice" **Simonson** had in his issue #9 interview, which is good; if the interviewer and the editor are doing their jobs, **Walt Simonson** won't "sound" (in print as in life) like **Frank Miller**, nor **Frank Miller** like **Joe Kubert.** (If I may blow my own horn — I usually have to pay someone at least five dollars to do it for me — I think one of my strong points in editing your interviews was identifying the interviewee's "voice" — his manner of speaking, his pet phrases, etc. and preserving that "voice" in print) **Patrick Daniel O'Neill** did a good job on the ROBOCOP VS. TERMINATOR interview because the **Walt Simonsen** in this interview sounded almost identical to the **Walt Simonson** of the interview in CI #9: relaxed, unpretentious, good-humored, personally "mellow" but very focused when it comes to what he wants from his art. So even though my interest in the project under discussion is minimal — I have not seen either ROBOCOP movie and have only seen bits and pieces of the first TERMINATOR

10th Anniversary of INTERVIEW!!

KIRBY

JACK APPEARS ON TV'S "BOB", IN IMAGE & TOPPS COMICS, TOO!

— I enjoyed the interview as a nice chat with "Uncle Walt."

"Last Word:" Don't know why your little *contretemps* with **Lou Mougin** over "Modern Country" music amused me, but it did Davey, I hardly know ye. Here's Mr. **Rolling Stones-Blue Oyster Cult-reggae fan** trying to turn the Mouge on to opera! Personally, I didn't mind "Old-Fashioned Country" that much; it had a nice undercurrent of "illicit" sexuality, as far as I can judge from the songs I heard, many of which dealt with adultery. As a son of Holy Mother Church — Irish division — I like sex spiced with religious guilt, so the image of all these Bible-Belt Christian women running off to the motels dressed in their tight cowgirl costumes titillated me no end, and that's what I *still* like about the South "Modern Country" doesn't interest me much, although on several occasions I have watched and enjoyed AUSTIN CITY LIMITS, if that's "MC." I'm surprised you didn't try to turn Le Mouge on to **Enya**, who I believe is one of your favorites and who is now, surprisingly, in the mainstream of pop culture —compared to when I discovered her on my own in the late '80s Her music has even been used as background for one of those seemingly interminable "montage" sequences on BAY WATCH. (Yeah, that's right, BAY WATCH. You feverish adolescents with over-active glands know what I'm talking about.) As long as we're plugging our respective musical tastes in a comic-book magazine I'll just throw in my two cents and tell your readers they should give a listen to the music of **Erich Wolfgang Korngold**, whose Romantic musical scores of the '30s and '40s laid the groundwork for the film music of **John Williams**, whose work I'm sure the folks know from the STAR WARS trilogy and E.T. **Korngold** also wrote a violin concerto and a symphony based on his film music, and his work is a good "bridge" from popular music to "classical."

Anyway, Lou, popular music reached its summit in 1979 with Village People's LIVE AND SLEAZY album; after that, everything else has pretty much been kitty litter.

Usually, I review each issue piece by piece, but I'll make an exception with CI #112. None of the pieces made much of an impression on me one way or another. The most interesting thing in the whole issue was **Will Meugniot's** statement that BOB (the new **Bob Newhart** sitcom) was based on the life of **Jack Kirby.** Is this true? Seems pretty far-fetched to me, although I suppose that someone *could* have originally based the concept on **Kirby's** life, only to see that original concept tinkered with and reworked until it got lost in the process. I know very little about the concretes of **Kirby's** bio, but I would guess **Kirby** is very unlike the repressed Irish Catholic "Bob McKay" whom **Newhart** portrays on the show.

If issue #112 left me pretty much Null and Void (remember them?), not so #113! OUTSTANDING! What other comic-book magazine would do, in effect, almost an entire "**Ayn Rand** Meets **Batman**" issue? My main cavil, re: the **Frank Miller** interview, is that I would have liked to have learned more about SIN CITY: what it's about, the main characters, the setting etc. But if you just wanted to whet my appetite for the series, you have succeeded. Just a few other comments on the **Miller** interview:

Re: the John Galt speech in ATLAS SHRUGGED **Miller** and **Dan Hagen** may

have a point that the speech wasn't really necessary in terms of getting across the message of the book; I haven't read the book in about two decades, so I don't know. But in terms of structure, I think the speech works as a climax, and a particularly fitting climax for a novel about the conflict of ideas. **Gore Vidal** once snidely called Galt "**Rand's** Heldentenor," but the old poufter may have had a point, and the speech acts (successfully, as I recall) as a kind of climactic, summarizing *aria*, like the Grail Narration in LOHENGRIN. The various heroes in ATLAS SHRUGGED have their own, shorter *arias*, building (as I recall) in size and scope, until — BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! KABOOM! POW! The Galt speech just overwhelms everything. In cinematic terms it could be compared to the climactic "blood ballet" in **Peckinpah's** THE WILD BUNCH — the various other scenes of carnage prepare the way, until the final explosion of small-arms fire, slow-motion falls and geysers of blood leaves the viewer spent, almost (to use an analogy **Rand** would probably have liked, if you know what I mean) ravaged. I don't smoke, but I almost feel after such moments someone next to me should offer me a cigarette.

I agree with **Miller** that **Michael Keaton** did a very good job as Bruce Wayne, given all the handicaps against him, particularly his looks and physique. I was one of the doubters who thought he was a poor choice for the role, and I, too, was won over by his performance. Recently, however, I saw the **Michael Keaton** movie THE DREAM TEAM (about four inmates from a "nut house" who get turned loose in New York City and end up fighting some corrupt, murderous cops), and if I had seen THE DREAM TEAM *before* I saw BATMAN, I would have been less skeptical about **Keaton** playing Bats. I think he is even better in THE DREAM TEAM than in BATMAN, but what's interesting is that he very convincingly plays a "loony" who turns violent avenger. The scene in THE DREAM TEAM when the **Keaton** character grabs an obnoxious customer in a restaurant and slams the guy's head into the table should have convinced anyone that **Keaton** was more than capable of playing an action hero "on the edge." (Or in the case of THE DREAM TEAM, over the edge.)

As for the **Nathaniel Branden** interview, this was one of the best things ever printed in COMICS INTERVIEW. Hail **Hagen!** How did "The Hague" know he could get a comics-oriented interview out of **Branden?** True, there was the reference to his liking Superman when he was a boy; but who knew **Branden** had read DARK KNIGHT? I particularly liked **Branden's** belief that readers of comic books allow the heroic ideals to influence them, on an abstract level, in their workaday lives, rather than just living off daydreams and empty fantasy. Every time I see some four-hundred-pound, triple-chinned guy on the bus reading a comic or a STAR TREK novel, as he shares with his fellow passengers the aroma of his armpits, I wonder: Doesn't this guy make any connection at all between his fantasy heroes and himself? He might not want to go to outer space and "boldly go where no man has gone before," but jeez, he could lose some weight (enough so that he didn't take up *two* seats on the bus) and practice the kind of personal hygiene one would expect from, say, James T. Kirk.

Remember, folks, the words of **Thoreau:** "Build castles in the air, and then put foundations under them."

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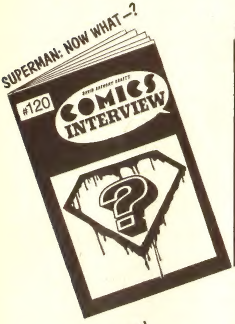

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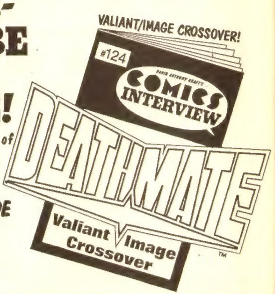

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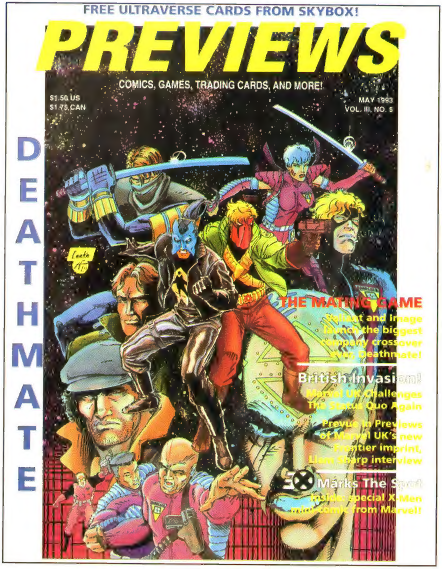

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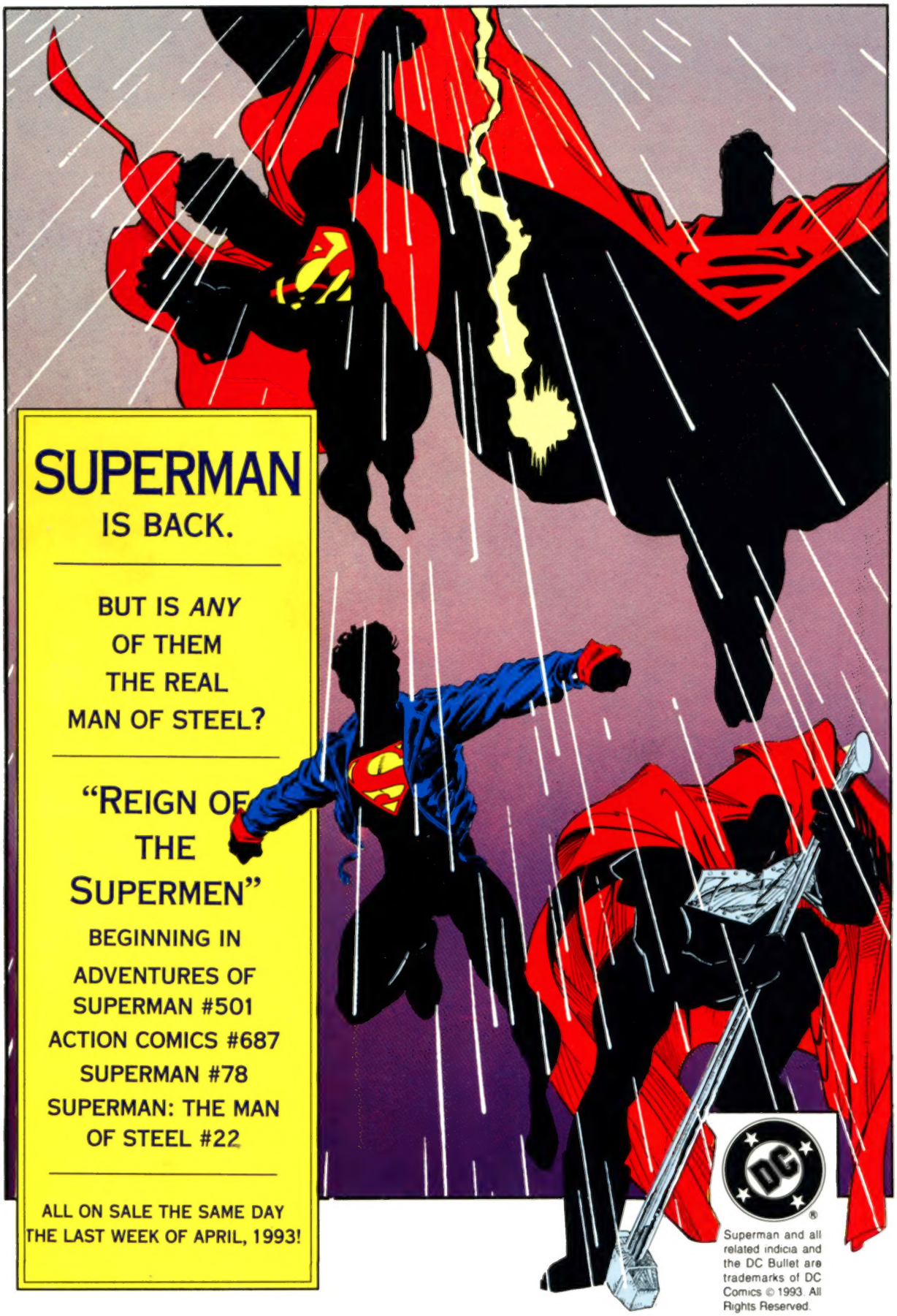

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